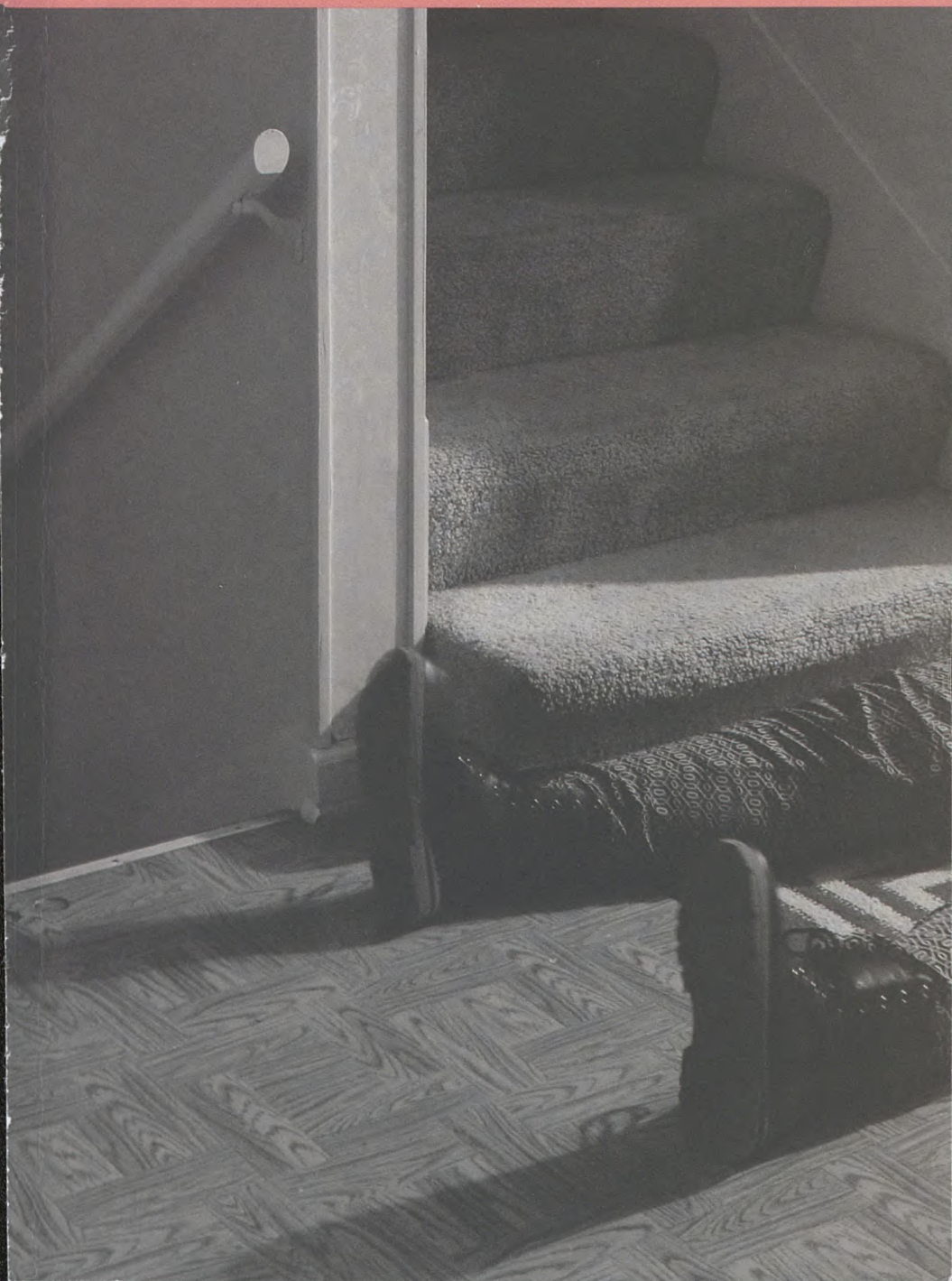


arden 2014







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volume XVI

2014

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CARSON McCULLERS LITERARY AWARDS WINNERS

Naartjie Multimedia Award for Expository Writing

Native Land by Katherine Russell from Colquitt County High School

Stephen Crane's Maggie: Finding Meaning in Existence by Gavin Thagard from Columbus State University

The Brick Road Greear Prize for Poetry

Where I am From by Bodie L. Fox from Armuchee High School

Kudzu by Morgan Lamberson from Columbus State University

The Orlene Jones Poulsen Award for Fiction

A Smile and a Nod by Katherine Dianne Hester from Richmond Hill High School

Salt Morning by Alyssa Hudson from Columbus State University

The Paul Hackett Award for Creative Nonfiction

What's in a Name? by Amy Pan from Parkview High School

Torn Pantyhose by Morgan Lamberson from Columbus State University

KOCIAN WINNERS 2014

Poetry

The Anatomy of Phineas Gage by Adam White

Fiction

The Sonata by Katherine Hinzman

Creative Nonfiction

Fuzzies by Julie Kuralt

Art

Untitled by Erin Bozone

EDITOR'S NOTE

Being a part of the *Arden* family has been such a rewarding experience. Before I signed on as editor in chief, I was unsure of what to expect and incredibly nervous about being a part of something with this magnitude. I knew the work load would be intense, but the students and the amazing staff have made my job so much easier. The staff has worked so hard, encouraging students to submit, providing their feedback, critiquing the submissions, reading and responding to my very, very long and rambling emails. Most importantly, the staff worked with a passion for this literary and arts journal, and I cannot thank them enough for all that they have done this year and all that they will do in the future for *Arden*.

Thinking about the future of *Arden*, I want to take a moment to think about *Arden*'s origins and the meaning behind our name. The *Arden* forefathers and foremothers chose the title of this journal, which comes from the name of a forest in William Shakespeare's "As You Like It." This forest is a place where the strings of reality are pulled and stretched, where, in the words of our first editor in chief, creativity flourishes and love blooms, where the oppressed and the virtuous can go to be away from the strict regulations of society, where the imagination suspends reality, allowing for wit and trickery, which delights and enlightens the mind.

This year, the submissions help build the world of *Arden*, and once again, the quality of work has been absolutely fantastic. The students made our jobs of narrowing down the selections so much more difficult and caused me some sleepless nights, but the editors and I want to thank them for it. Reading their work has definitely been one of my favorite parts of the publication process. Studying the submissions, I noticed that the complexity of the human spirit seems to rise to the surface so beautifully through the voices and images in various uplifting, heart-breaking, and thought-provoking ways. Embedded in these works is this curiosity as well as a taste for a journey. Not as dangerous as Bilbo's journey, but a journey nonetheless. Therefore, the editors and I strive to take readers on a journey, from the very first line to the last, through these varied perspectives and voices, genres, and images that hopefully touch and move you, perhaps even in unexpected ways.

The submissions in this volume are only a small portion of the breath-taking work generated by students from all fields here at Columbus State University. I cannot say enough about how talented the students are at this university. I am so blessed to say that I have been a part of the *Arden* family. In this volume, you will also see the winners of the first annual Carson McCullers Literary Awards, an award series recognizing the literary achievements of both high school and college students. I hope that readers will recognize the talent of these students and that writers and artists will continue producing such high-quality work and being so gracious as to share it with the *Arden* family for many, many years to come.

Take a moment and breathe in the scents of these pages, turn the pages, and enter

the world of *Arden*. Travel with us on this journey, and hopefully, at the destination, the name, *Arden*, and its significance will resonate a bit differently with you.

Thank you all so much for the continued support for *Arden* and the *Arden* family. Now, without further ado, I am pleased to present to you *Arden* 2014.

Morgan Lamberson
Editor in Chief

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After I had already bought the camera,
I opened it to find a roll of film inside.
I went to the store and got it developed,
And a week later, I was looking at someone
else's memories. A little girl was the main
focus, her family fading into the
background. She was on the beach, and,
even though it was a black and white
photo, I knew her swimsuit would be bright.
Mine was.

In another picture, the little girl was in a
ballerina outfit, dancing for an audience.
She pulled a man, her father, out of his chair,
inviting him to dance.

The dance went on for a few photos;
Both the dancers beaming.

Then she was back at the beach. She
was another year older, and the
smile and bright swimsuit were gone.

The pictures went on from there,
and the girl, not as little, grew
sadder. The father, I noticed,
didn't again make an appearance.

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AFTER THE TORNADO BY TOM INGRAM

After the tornado ate his shop, Daddy decided to take what little money the insurance paid and move us to Albany. Work had been slow even before the tornado, and I guess Daddy thought the move would let him start new.

He and Mamma quarreled about moving. Macon was her home, and Daddy couldn't understand this. His only connection to Macon was that he'd been stationed there when he received his Air Force discharge. I listened to them argue at night after my sisters and I snuck off to bed. Whatever started it never seemed like the sort of thing to precipitate a fight. But I learned to wait. Maybe Mamma would mention her garden club meeting, or maybe Daddy would talk about a building he had in mind to rent. Ice would clatter to the bottom of a glass; they would chuckle at the late night comic. Another mention of Mamma's ties to Macon or Daddy's ambitions in Albany would go without a response from the other. I would drift off, either because I'd decided that that night would somehow be different or because I was just too tired to keep waiting. Just as I seemed to be dreaming, the storm would burst.

We moved to Albany in July.

Daddy found an old garage to open his print shop in. When I wasn't helping Daddy set up his new shop, I helped Mamma and my sisters arrange our new house. The house wasn't as spacious as our last, but Mamma and Daddy both insisted that it was temporary, that once business picked up we could stop renting and buy a place of our own. The house was on a lonesome street. No houses nearby, no kids to ride bikes with, just a large, rocky yard surrounded by kudzu coated pine stands and a cracked two lane road. The house had only two bedrooms, but I didn't mind. I slept on an old military cot on the screened-in back porch where I could stay up nights and read without Daddy noticing the little lamp-light.

In the fall, we started school, which I remember hating. I guess my sisters hated it too. Of course we missed our friends. Daddy was always gone to work before we woke up, and at dinner he spoke voraciously about where he'd moved this or that machine, an advertising man with promising ideas, a new wholesaler. Mamma seemed more tired than ever. She had stopped eating her dinner, though she still fixed a plate. As soon as the dishes were washed and stowed, she went to bed. At night, I waited. Ice would clatter to the bottom of a glass. Daddy would grunt at the late night comic. Just as I seemed to be dreaming, the storm would break.

I guess it was about that time I stopped praying.

I don't remember if my sisters were any good at school when we lived in Albany, but I know I wasn't. Daddy wasn't doing very well either, and one chilly night at the dinner table, he said that he would do the very best he could for Christmas but that we oughtn't get our hopes too high. The important thing was, he insisted, that we were all together, healthy, a family. Mamma smiled, refilled her glass. Dishes done, she went to bed.

Daddy loved all holidays, but Christmas especially. I wonder sometimes if he ever slept on Christmas Eve or if the excitement coursing through him kept him awake until dawn. Daddy was never a beer drinker, but as soon as I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and shuffled into the living room—that Christmas in Albany and every Christmas I spent with him that I can remember—Daddy had a can of Miller in his hand and up-tempo Christmas tunes playing on the stereo and seemed just as happy a person as you could ever hope to see in your life.

Daddy had been right; there wasn't much under the tree—though Daddy had somehow managed to find the tallest and healthiest tree our tight living room could contain. Whether my sisters were as disappointed as I was or not, I can't say, but we all did our best to match Daddy's mood. Mamma, too, appeared happy. Daddy brought her a Miller with a wink and a kiss. We opened our few presents. A pair of roller skates and a portable AM/FM radio for the girls. I discovered for myself a pack of baseball cards. And a boomerang.

Where the hell the old man found a boomerang, I can't imagine. Why the hell he thought I'd like a boomerang, I'll never know. It didn't matter. As soon as I unwrapped the odd-shaped thing, Daddy put his hand on my shoulder and said something of a kind I'm not sure he had ever said to me before or would ever say to me again after that Christmas morning in Albany, Georgia.

"After breakfast I'll show you how to use it."

I don't remember that breakfast. I don't know if I was too excited to eat or so excited that I choked the meal down as quick as I could. Either way, I sure must have sat in suspense for a long time. Daddy always had a big appetite. For such a small man, even years later as an old man, I don't think I've ever seen someone with such a boundless appetite.

It was a beautiful late morning. The sky was a vibrant gray, warm sunlight filtering through high altitude clouds. Miller in his left hand and my boomerang in his right, he led me out into our dry, rocky yard. He took a firm stance, like a pitcher on the mound, and explained with a slow-motion demonstration how to side arm the boomerang so that it would fly off and circle back to you. I wasn't sure that I could throw it the right way.

"Want me to go first?" he asked.

I sure did. I surely did.

Daddy set his Miller can on the dirt, dug his heels into the coarse earth, and cocked back his arm. With a jerk, he sent the boomerang sailing into the air. I thought I could hear it whirl, but I knew I could hear it crash, get swallowed up by the thick, dead kudzu.

Daddy picked up his Miller can as I raced after the boomerang. As I thrashed into the brush as far as I could, Daddy came over and stepped up on his toes to get a better look.

"I don't see it," I told him.

Daddy shrugged. "Well. Let's see if your Mamma has any cookies out of the oven,"

he said and walked away.

In spring, Mamma's brother-in-law offered Daddy some start up money, and we moved back to Macon, to old friends and to a new house. I had my own room again. Daddy's business rebounded, and that next Christmas he seemed to be trying to make up for the previous Christmas there were so many boxes under the tree. At night, when my sisters and I snuck off to bed, I still waited for the inevitable storm.



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MAMMALIAN BY SAM ALLISTON

I was given breasts: large, uneven, beautiful boobs. & there has been debate swarming them, as if I were a hive, swollen with so many bees you must walk nineteen feet away and around to survive.

Momma was given larger, & at a younger age, so pubescent boys asked her to sit at the back of the bus to watch each bump on the way to 6th grade shove her breasts beneath her chin. She says it was painful, but having someone want her presence made it okay.

I've had friends admit their jealousy: *It's what every man wants.*

But I've been stared at for full minutes, their faces resembling religious awakenings, never bothering to hear me speak before they admire my body. And what of my wants?

Momma taught me to be modest, even when they were just rolls, deprived of mother estrogen & her ability to make males look. I figured it a method of value.

When the airbag failed to deploy, it was the soft tissue that kept my ribs from puncturing my lungs. Black and purple fanned beneath my right nipple, crept to my sternum. Now mothers are jealous.

& Momma hands me her old bras, fills my drawers with underwear that doesn't fit her curves. We talk boys, growing up in different times and with different personalities. She says to dress and play the part if I want to make a male my companion.

I have let boys see my body against their sheets, let their hands squeeze and push and stick, & hold my breasts like two buildings they want to fall between. & after all that,

it is still a body.

And why return to Phineas Gage?
—a foreman who worked the rails—
who, pierced through the eye
by a tamping iron, survived. But
his friends said he wasn't Gage anymore.

It drove through his brain; he should not have survived,
but instead he was quiet, and for some time,
he did reckless things, could not keep a job,
he hastened to anger, was certainly changed,
but despite what was said, he knew he was Gage.

And he was. As far as he knew himself.
As far as one can know. He was
what was left. What was worse, Phineas:
being changed or being expected
to have stayed the same?

But most folks didn't know what to expect,
and everyone wanted to see.

In your photograph, your chin is set high,
and you can barely see the scars. Your eye!
It's simply shut. The iron's in your hand.

You kept on, and people had to dig
for the mysteries inside your head.
They lied about you, they used you,
and now they've mapped your brain,
and look at me, I'm using you too.

Phineas Gage was a man who worked the rails,
and survived the loss of his left frontal lobe.
We made of him a myth for the demystifiers.
And why speak of evidence?
And why Phineas Gage?

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SANCTUARY BY KAITLYN UNDERWOOD





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SILENCE BY LINDSAY MARCHELLO

There are no words
for people like me.
Only the silence that
persists in the mind,
when God is absent,
and dreams wither
away like the eventual
erosion of an old stone monument,
once grand and revered,
now grounded down to merely dust and brick.
Forgotten, but not forgiven.

It is not the act of death that frightens me,
not the last sigh in the silence of night.

No, it is what comes after the end
that scares me so.

Long, listless hallways,
shrouded in darkness and neglect,
calling again and again
for a voice in the dark
but No One answers.

I do not know what comes after,
but I know what I fear.

The trinity of loneliness, silence,
and the final act of disappointment.

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RYLEIGH BY SAM ALLISTON

Your mother sweats sex when she comes through the door
and I know you smell it: kindergarten hands trying
to slide sausage out of the skillet, onto your plate, but Nana
snatches you. *You know better.* And how can that be when

at home your mother sleeps in whiskey, swims down the
ditch and resurfaces younger, child-less, glitter stuck in
her foiled hair. So you play with your little brother, teach
him how to walk across the un-level floor, explain your
dad does not have a name or height. All this shouting

to let someone help you. But you are already tired,
stringing together truths for your grandmother,
great-grandmother, aunts and uncles who give everything
to replace her: *I don't know where she is.*

You come to me in hiding, ask why I want to nap
so much, why I don't comb my hair. I tell you calmly,
hold you as my own, that your dimples could be
mine and the prints on your skin would return to your
mother, these small bruises begging for attention.



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AM I DONE YET? BY ASHLEY JAY

My phone buzzed, and I grabbed it quickly. I knew it would be a message from the guy I had been texting. I had tiny penguins in my stomach just from thinking about him, with his face and biceps. I told them to calm down, but they continued to waddle around. I mean, yeah things seemed to be going somewhere; he always texts me, seems interested in what I have to say, the usual. But the penguins always get my hopes up.

"I'm not saying this could ever happen, but please don't interpret my friendship for something more."

The penguins suddenly started pushing down on my stomach, dragging it as low as it could go. I tried to breathe in, calm them, but my throat was closing up.

I love knitting and crocheting and doing crafts with my hands. The problem is that I can never seem to finish projects. That's how I am with the rest of my life too. I'll pick up a book, read about half, and then put it down to pick up another. I used to think it was because of my attention span, and my psychiatrist even gave me Ritalin to help. I got the shakes instead.

Maybe the reason I don't finish books is because I don't finish things in real life. Fiction, or at least the kind I read, is a mirror to life or something like that.

Sometimes in movies, especially chick flicks, you know the ending because you know the genre. The chicks who watch these flicks know that the girl and guy will end up together, so why watch the movie? Sometimes the journeys to the end-kiss seem almost too similar, but I will still go watch the newest Katherine Heigl movie, eagerly munching popcorn and Bunch-A-Crunch, waiting for the moment they realize they were right for each other all along.

But that's not how life works. Or at least my life doesn't. I have had all of one boyfriend, and I don't even want to claim him (it lasted less than a month, and I had to set up his Facebook for him since he couldn't figure it out). Then there were all the guys I thought could be something, but weren't. There was always something coming up, commitment issues being the most common. Isn't that always the way?

Recently, I could have something with this guy. He was cute, funny, Christian, and pretty much all I wanted. Problem? Only one. He was in love with another girl who didn't like him back. As soon as she falls in love, maybe we can go find some fairies in the woods to wreak havoc. I've heard that always turns out well. Does anyone else remember the Kirsten Dunst/Sisquoo movie based off *Midsummer*? That was the first Shane West movie I saw, so I expected him to be a bad guy in all his movies, which is why I didn't cry the first time I saw *A Walk to Remember*. Later on, I realized that I shouldn't be glad when bad things happen to bad people. I also, reluctantly, learned that actors aren't the characters they play.

Sometimes I feel like my romantic-comedy—or as connoisseurs such as myself call

them, rom-com—moment is coming up, but then I remember that I'm not in a movie. It's like jarring yourself out of life for a second. That's my least favorite thing to happen while watching a movie. I want to get lost in it, forget about my life for a few hours, and go on a journey with these two crazy kids. But then there will be something that reminds you of your own life, making you aware that you're just watching a movie. I'm all for meta and breaking the fourth-wall in artsy films, like *Annie Hall*, but not in the bubbly escapes Hollywood puts out year after year.

I stared at my phone for longer than I want to admit, hoping I was reading this wrong. The text, I mean. But no, I had been reading everything else wrong. I had been letting my hopes bring me out of the icy, Arctic pool of singledom, hoping that I was finally finding the right guy. I mean, yeah, I had heard about him still being in love with his ex, but in the movies that doesn't mean much.

This generation hopes for the best when they settle down with their partner, as they should. Going into a life-long commitment, marriage or otherwise, a person should be optimistic, not counting all the things their partner does wrong. Well, except the way they put toilet paper on the roll. There is only one correct way, and you should make sure your companion knows this. But like I said, life isn't a movie. There might not even be such a thing as 'soul mates,' as depressed as that makes me feel. But, as soon as I accept that, I see another movie, and think, "Nope, I was wrong. I want one."

I remember how jolting *Princess Diaries 2* was. It was one of the first sequels I remember looking forward to, because I had a crush on the guy she ended up with in the first movie and the books. But where was he? Not in Genova! They had broken up! That's not supposed to happen in Movie Land. If you end up with a guy in a rom-com, you stick it out to the end of Happily Ever After. Or at least that's what I thought before this movie.

Earlier that night, before he texted me, we had gone to a friend's house to watch an Audrey Hepburn movie, and he had sat next to me, and though it was one of the only seats left, the penguins still preened at his choice. We had traded little comments on the movie, and then he put his arm over the back of the couch.

Here it comes, I thought. Maybe he'll finally make a move. It's got to be about halfway through the get-together part of our movie. I leaned back, bracing myself for the feeling of his hand curling around my shoulder. Nothing happened.

Maybe he's just shy, the penguins tried to rationalize. I knew it was only one option, but I let myself believe that might be the case. Maybe he was shy, maybe he had been burned by the last girl he liked, maybe he didn't like PDA.

Maybe he didn't like me.

During my first year of college, my parents got a divorce. My dad was caught cheating, and I was more devastated than my mom. She admitted that she hadn't been happy for a while and had been crying herself to sleep at night. I had been oblivious. I had thought my parents were living out the life expected after the end of the movie. I mean, sure they had some fights, but doesn't every couple? My dad had been what I thought a king should be, including loyal to those he said he loved. When I found out he wasn't, my world shattered.

Don't get me wrong; I love my dad, and in hindsight, I realize my parents probably should have gotten a divorce years ago. But they didn't. The year when everything is supposed to change for a young adult: it sucked. I had to move out of my childhood home, into an apartment with my mom.

If my parents, the people I thought were living the King and Queen of my Princess story, couldn't stay together, where was the hope for me, or anyone? They couldn't finish their lives together. They barely finished my childhood in tact. Or maybe, they did finish, but they just ended early.

At the end of *Princess Diaries 2* I was rooting for Anne Hathaway and Chris Pine (yeah, that was him in this movie; I didn't remember either) to end up together. I had moved on from guy from the first movie just like the princess had. I learned there is more than one prince in the kingdom, and you might not get your soul mate on your first coach ride, if he's even real.

That's why I loved *Enchanted*. She starts off with this Hollywood-romance mind-set, where she is supposed to marry the first guy who looks her way, and she even goes to the castle for the wedding. But the queen won't have it and sends her to the real world. I think she did her a favor. Given a little reality, even though it's not her own, the main character, Giselle, falls for the man off the street. She may be a really extreme case of the manic pixie dream girl, but she's what our society tells girls they should want to be. But, if the queen hadn't sent her away, she would have lived a life where she might have been happy. But I think she would have this empty feeling, just below the surface, that she couldn't quite name. She would probably start to take it out on the prince, pushing him away until he wasn't even positive there was such a thing as happy-ever-after. He would, soon after, be caught in the chamber-maid's quarters.

I finally started typing, messaging him back: "I'm not. Or, at least, I'm not trying too. I know you're in love with someone else."

Buzz.

"That's what Grace said too."

Grace, of course, was the heroine of her story. She's the one he's still in love with, and who could blame him. Everyone loves Grace; she's beautiful, funny, smart, and way too talented at everything she touches.

In *27 Dresses*, Katherine Heigl (who would've thought we'd ever see her in a rom-com? Shocker.), Jane, is in love with her boss, Hal, who falls in love with Jane's sister, Tess. Jane, probably playing off the plain Jane stereotype, is straight-laced and a complete opposite of her sister, a manic-pixie if ever there was one, but without that dream-girl part that seems essential to the genre. That's probably why she isn't the main character of her own movie. Jane is in love with someone who is in love with someone else, a concept tons of females can relate to. But does she end up with Hal? (If you haven't watched the movie, or haven't, you know, lived life, spoiler alert) Nope. She ends up with the guy she thought she hated, Kevin, played by James Marsden, and in my opinion, the obvious choice. To be realistic, maybe they should make the guy she's in love with as awesome as the guy she ends up with, or the struggle just looks like stubbornness.

In life, whenever I'm into a guy who likes someone else (read: now), I like to imagine him coming to his senses, sweeping me off my feet, and making up for lost time. I never think of the guy I despise as being my soul mate. I thought I would be Kevin, not Jane. But in order for there to be the guy who gets the girl, there has to be a girl who loses out on the guy she thought she was going to get, do ya' get me?

I think the problem today is that we finish things too quickly. When I was growing up, I kept hearing that I shouldn't be in a hurry and that I would miss "these days." To be fair, I do miss the good parts, like sleeping in on the weekends and not having to go to work, but I don't miss all of the bad stuff going down when that placating phrase was whipped out. And, that's true of any time in our lives. We miss and remember the good stuff of the past when we're going through the hell of the present. Including those cutesy movies we'd seen where everything magically works out and is fixed by the power of love. So we think, if I settle down with my boyfriend, it'll work out. We can face the hard times together with our Heart ring (what did that kid even bring to the table in *Captain Planet?*). If my boyfriend and I have a baby, it'll fix even more problems because we'll have more love. But that's a screwed up way of seeing things.

"Touche. I'll try not to fall head over heels for you. We can just be friends. ☺" I sent back.

My penguins were waddling faster, angry at my acquiescence. They wanted to find

someone to give their pebble to, to finally finish my love story. But, what can I do? Weeks after this exchange, I'm finding that I might have lied. I do have feelings for him (But who doesn't, excluding the blind?). I know it's not going to happen, so there's not a point in pining. These stupid penguins, however, are addicted to the end of rom-coms. They mosh around in my belly at the final kiss of almost every romantic movie—except the crappy ones, they do have taste, thank God—and they make me tongue-tied around him. Sometimes, it's like they're sabotaging me, even though it goes against their end-game, the stupid pests.

—

Through all this, I've had friends tell me: If you end your single life now, you might miss something down the road. And he might miss something too. And I get that, cognitively. Yeah, you guys might have a high percent of compatibility, which Hollywood says is rare in life, so it must be hard to find the soul mate, but if life kinda sucks now, and there are parts of your relationship that won't ever be fixed, then no babies for you. A baby won't know how to fix things. It cries until gets its way, and I know from experience that doesn't work for grown-ups, especially at work.

The problem is that the penguins haven't learned this. And for some reason, they have the reins of my heart and sometimes, unfortunately, my actions, including the sending of ill-advised text messages. I'm trying to tell them, go out in the world and sample different books. Or watch movies. Or just live. You don't have to finish now—it's too early. It's a constant battle, but I have to put myself first, not whatever future I could have with Prince Charming.



ARDEN XVI

PARLIAMENT OF OWLS BY DEREK MILLS



They say that having a pet increases a person's happiness. They usually cite the dog as the ultimate source of happiness—man's best friend, the loyal pet. I could see it. A lonely night at home, no one to hang out with, you start thinking how much of a loner you are, how you never go out anymore, and you feel depressed, but then Sparky and Skipper come running out to play with you, and suddenly you don't feel so alone anymore. At least, that's how I imagine it, if I had a dog.

My dad is allergic to all things fuzzy. All denominations of fur and feather are on the Do Not Touch List or his eyes water up and he can't breathe. We had a no-pet home until one day my mom brought home a betta fish, which she had won somehow at work. I was fascinated by this fish. He was so pretty with his mixture of shades of blue. I gave him the very original title of Mr. Fishy. I don't remember him ever dying.

Eventually, my dad got himself a fish tank, around two feet in length, and filled it with about six or seven tiny fish. I even asked to get my own fish. My dad bought me a little fish tank for my room, and I picked out my own betta fish, this time a pink and red one. I named it Kana—a play on the Japanese word for fish, *sakana*.

I grew very attached to this fish. I sat the tank right at the front of my desk so I could watch it swim around in its tiny home. I got little rocks for the tank and a small fake plant. I was in eighth grade, and I had a pet to call my own for the first time and I was excited, even though I couldn't really play with it. I do remember when that fish died. It was my first real pet, and I cried. I never touched it in our whole relationship, but I cried. A girl in my class overheard a conversation I was having about it with a friend, and she interjected, "You cried over a fish? It's just a damn fish. Just get a new one."

Whenever I go to a friend's house and they have a furry animal, the little girl in me swallows me whole and completely loses it. I almost spend more time petting their cats and playing with their dogs than I do with them. They are so soft and warm, and sometimes they sit in your lap or follow you around. Those are my favorite ones, when they actually love you and aren't "just an animal."

I had a friend who owned a cat named Hazel, and that was the first cat I ever liked. Most of my encounters with cats in the past were the usual kind one would expect: indifferent to your existence. But this cat would come sit with me if I asked her to and would lie in my lap for hours, and I would just pet her. She let me scratch under her chin, her favorite spot, and then she would rub her head lovingly against me. She didn't even scrape my legs up like other cats do. I almost felt like I loved her more than her owner did, because I'd never had a "fuzzy" as I call them, and it meant so much to me that one would actually show me affection.

But that cat was old, and when it died, I cried over someone else's pet.

I got more betta fish over the next few years. After the first one, I was reluctant to get a second and go through that pain again. I could only imagine how I would feel if I had a dog and it died. I would have an actual bond with it, have played with it and spent years with it. If I hurt so much over a fish, I would have to shut my life down for a few weeks over a "real" pet.

But my friend wanted to get a betta fish for herself, so she goaded me into getting one with her, despite my extreme hesitation. But, I ended up loving it just as I did my last one, if not more. This one was named Shaun, after my friend—a blue and green fish.

He lasted a little longer than Kana did, but not much longer. He lived a little over a year, and then I got my next fish, Dimitri, who lived almost three years. It was my running joke to say that he was an immortal fish, because most fish don't live nearly that long. Both of those fish developed pop eye, a disease where a bubble forms over one or both eyes and it becomes puffy and swollen. It hurt to see them look like that, with their frail little bodies. It is treatable, but because they are fish, it seems very likely they will not survive. We got them their treatment, and miraculously, both trudged on through it and were healed, and lived a good while after the fact. But eventually, they had to go, too, and I cried harder each time.

The last fish I had was Finn, a pretty blue and pink fish. This one was ripped away from me after just a few months. There were no signs of fishy sickness like there usually are. I had just changed his water the night before, and the next morning, I woke to find him on his side, the vibrant color drained from him, lying on the rocks. The same thing kept happening to my dad's fish. He changed the water, and soon after, there were bodies buried in the rocks. We determined that something in the water was poisoning them. Their water. Their air.

To rectify the situation, my dad has been buying special gallons of water from the store, which seems to be purer than regular water. I thought it was ridiculous to have to buy water just so your fish could live, so I swore off of them ever since.

I went to visit my boyfriend Jeff's mom's house in Alabama, and there was an animal I was not used to seeing there. It was a little Chihuahua that his grandma was keeping there for a while, in addition to the other pets they already have. I have two Chihuahuas next door where I live, and they are horrible little beasts. They bark incessantly at nothing and chase after you, the pathetic little things, but if you turn on them and run right back at them, they whine and run away (but only after pooping in our yard). So, I wasn't as excited to see this fuzzy. But this little dog followed me around the house and jumped up on the couch to sit with me, and I didn't even ask her to. For some reason, she decided she liked me quite a lot, presumably because the rest of the people in the house saw her

as a nuisance, and I would give her the privilege of scratching behind her ears. She was always running after me wherever I went and wanted to sit with me. I loved feeling that affection. I never thought I would grow to love a Chihuahua.

The next time I visited, that little dog was so excited to see me that she ran all over the house barking and jumping up and down. I picked her up, and she licked my face. I really felt it. A dog really does make you happier.

But his grandma eventually wanted her back, so I had to say goodbye.

When my brother moved out of the house, he decided soon after that he wanted to get a dog or a cat. He was living alone, so he probably wanted that happiness everyone keeps talking about. He decided on adopting a cat. I met this cat, but she was no Hazel. She was fat and lazy and didn't really do anything. I was disappointed; another chance at a fuzzy in my life, but she was boring and didn't like me. But he loved her enough for the both of us. Coming from a No Pet Zone, of course the first fuzzy he got would be all over Facebook, and we'd have to sit through pictures and videos of it.

That cat died too, of some sickness she had unbeknownst to him when he adopted her, but I only felt bad for my brother that time. He then got a new cat, a younger one who wasn't sick. She doesn't like me much, either, but at least she will play with me.

Jeff bought a bunny for me because he wanted me to be happy. I have always been fond of rabbits because they are so cute, and I have wanted one for a long time, but he had to keep her at his apartment because of my dad's allergies. She is an all black rabbit with the droopy lop ears. I named her Bunbun, another generic naming on my part, but he officially named her Maxine, after the Beatles song "Maxwell's Silver Hammer" when we still thought she was a boy; it is difficult to tell the gender of a rabbit when they are young.

She was always a little skeptical of us. Even when she was a baby she liked to hop away and hide under chairs. Still, I used to hold her and cuddle with her, and sometimes she would lick me. One time while I was holding her, Jeff turned the vacuum on and it scared her and she buried her little head in my arm. I rescued her from her offender and took her to another room and pet her to calm her down. I thought it was adorable, and I was glad there was at least some trust there.

Unfortunately, due to some issues with his roommates, Jeff decided to move back home to Alabama, which meant the bunny would go with him, and I couldn't see her so much anymore. Now, every time she sees me, she looks at me like I'm holding a giant knife, even though she has known me her whole life. She won't let me hold her anymore. Sometimes if I spend about an hour straight petting her, she grows to trust me and might even hop on me, but the next time she sees me, she will think I'm an axe murderer all

over again. Apparently, rabbit memories last for about two minutes.

We got her a second bunny friend once she was grown. I'd read that bunnies need friends or they will be sad because they're pack animals, and who wants a sad bunny? All the store had was babies, which I worried about since Bunbun would be over twice its size. There were only three rabbits to choose from, and we had to make sure the one we got was also a girl. We found a cute little white rabbit with long ears. And just as I'd worried, Bunbun hated her. She made growling noises I didn't know she could make. We had to keep them in separate cages for a long time.

Meanwhile, I absolutely fell in love with this white bunny, which I named Luna. She was not averse to being held like Bunbun is, and would actually play instead of just sit in the corner. She ran around the room hopping excitedly and was not afraid to hop up to us. She even licked us, constantly, something Bunbun stopped doing years ago. She made all my bunny dreams come true, if only Bunbun would accept her.

Eventually, Jeff forced her to. He put them in the same cage and sprayed Bunbun with water if she was mean. They ended up living okay with each other.

Then we realized Luna was a he. We had to give him away.

Through all my observations, an animal is a lot to handle. You don't just live alongside them and play with them. You have to buy food, dishes, toys, and take care of them. Sometimes they are really annoying. They ruin your things, chew through your books and furniture and clothes, pee and poop everywhere. You have to train them and hope they don't destroy everything when you leave the room. They bark at night or scratch the floor with their claws. They leave fur everywhere. They smell.

But do I still want one? I do. I want one that I can call my own, that I won't have to say goodbye to because it isn't mine. I want to post a thousand pictures of it on Facebook and make people watch videos they don't want to see. I want that happiness everyone else can feel.



ARDEN XVI

THE SONATA BY KATHERINE HINZMAN

Students crowded the shuttle bus where I sat pressed against a hand-smudged window. Like fish caught up from the sea, we were wet, wriggling, and odorous. The incoherent conversation of their voices blended with the rain on the roof. I hid behind the words of my textbook, separating myself from the mass, their stench and their rabble. But my eyes dragged over the words, exhausted from the previous class and exhausted already for the next.

I looked up from my book as the shuttle came to an unexpected stop. The driver flung open the doors, and a soggy, apologetic visage of a person climbed inside. He shook a mop of dark hair and, in his nervous way, glanced around for an empty seat. When his gaze landed on me, my heart lurched, and a volatile spark of recognition ignited between us.

It would not hold for long. The bus began again. He was forced to shuffle past me and into the only empty seat a few rows back.

My exhaustion had vanished. In its place, a million needles stood up on my arms, my neck, down my spine. My breath was shallow. It was impossible to swallow past my tightened throat. I pretended to read but could not. The weight of his stare smothered me with forsaken memories.

I sat next to him on the piano bench, sides of our thighs barely touching. He played madly. In an instant, the chords started pulsing through my blood, wrapping me wholly in their melodies. He stained the ivory keys with messy lust, tender love, raw sorrow. It became my lust, my love, my sorrow. Alone, within the solitary white walls of the practice room, the glossy Steinway, the beautiful music – his beautiful music – I realized his beauty.

I desperately searched out the window to escape this bus – myself. Instead, the dirty pane exposed my truest emotions with cruel clarity. The rain drowned my reflection; my face melting, weeping, mourning for a love lost.

The music stopped.

The hands that had commanded divine sound from such a cold inanimate object now reached for me. Tentative fingertips brushed my cheek. He cradled my face with soft, warm palms. I remained powerless; unable to move, unable to blink, unable to breathe. I was his captive, like the piano.

He kissed me.

I implored myself to shake free of these memories, the events that filled me with a mix of my past longing and present anger. Our beginning inevitably led me to thoughts of our end – the memory that tarnished all others.

"Why can't you just be normal!" I half-yelled, half-begged.

He flicked a disregarding hand in my direction, a graceful swat at an annoying insect. He returned to his piano bench – the very one we had shared countless times before. He ignored me, squinting through dirtied lenses at the score before him.

"Why don't you ever listen to me?" I said, my fists clenched in frustration.

He looked at me with dark, unfeeling eyes. "If you don't like it, you can leave."

I was stunned to silence by his ultimatum.

Without a pause, he delivered his final, catastrophic punch. "I don't need you. You are a waste of my time."

He stretched his fingers and warmed them up on the keys, dismissing me from his presence - his life. I turned on my heel, walked out, and slammed the door so the strings on every instrument trembled.

In the hall, I caught myself on the nearest wall and held myself there as the first miserable tear fell. I heard him starting to play again in his practice room. The song was gentle, soft, and slow. But the chords carried a different sound now, an unforgiving assault on my senses.

I pulled myself slowly down the hall - away from his music, away from him.

The bus came to a stop. The rain was still falling. Other, more fortunate students were already gathering their raingear and shuffling off the bus. Their colorful umbrellas sprang to life as they entered the unfriendly grey seas. Inwardly scolding myself, I tossed my flimsy jacket over my head and forced my way down the aisle, out into the weather.

I could now escape to the safety of my next class. I walked with brisk purpose, weighty backpack bouncing against my spine. He was somewhere not far behind. Before I knew it, he was at my side, protecting me from the rain with his umbrella. I did not speak. He seemed satisfied enough not to speak as well. I did not look at him. But I would not flee from him either. I appreciated the thin membrane he held over me as I continued to walk.

Finally, we arrived under the covered awnings of my destination. Only then did I turn to face him. His appearance was as laughable as it was endearing. His hair and his clothes were drenched, stuck to his pallid body. He had walked all that while in the rain, determined to shield me even as the elements battered him.

He glanced briefly at the door, an anxious gesture of his eyes. "This is it?"

"Yes..."

A moment of silence hung between us, neither certain of what to say, how to act.

"I - I should go..." I looked at the door.

"Oh yes...yes." He gave a quick nod, flinging a few droplets here and there.

I met his eyes through his rain-splattered glasses. In them, I found a sliver of my warmest memories, remembrances of his sweetest songs. To me he was a sonata composed of many movements, dark in one instant and light in the next. It was his tragedy. For this I loved and could not love him; I ached for what we were and could not be.

"Thank you," I murmured softly.

Quite suddenly, he smiled. Cold, wet, and dreary, his face nonetheless brightened with boyish enthusiasm.

With that, he left me. I watched him and his umbrella disappear into the rain.

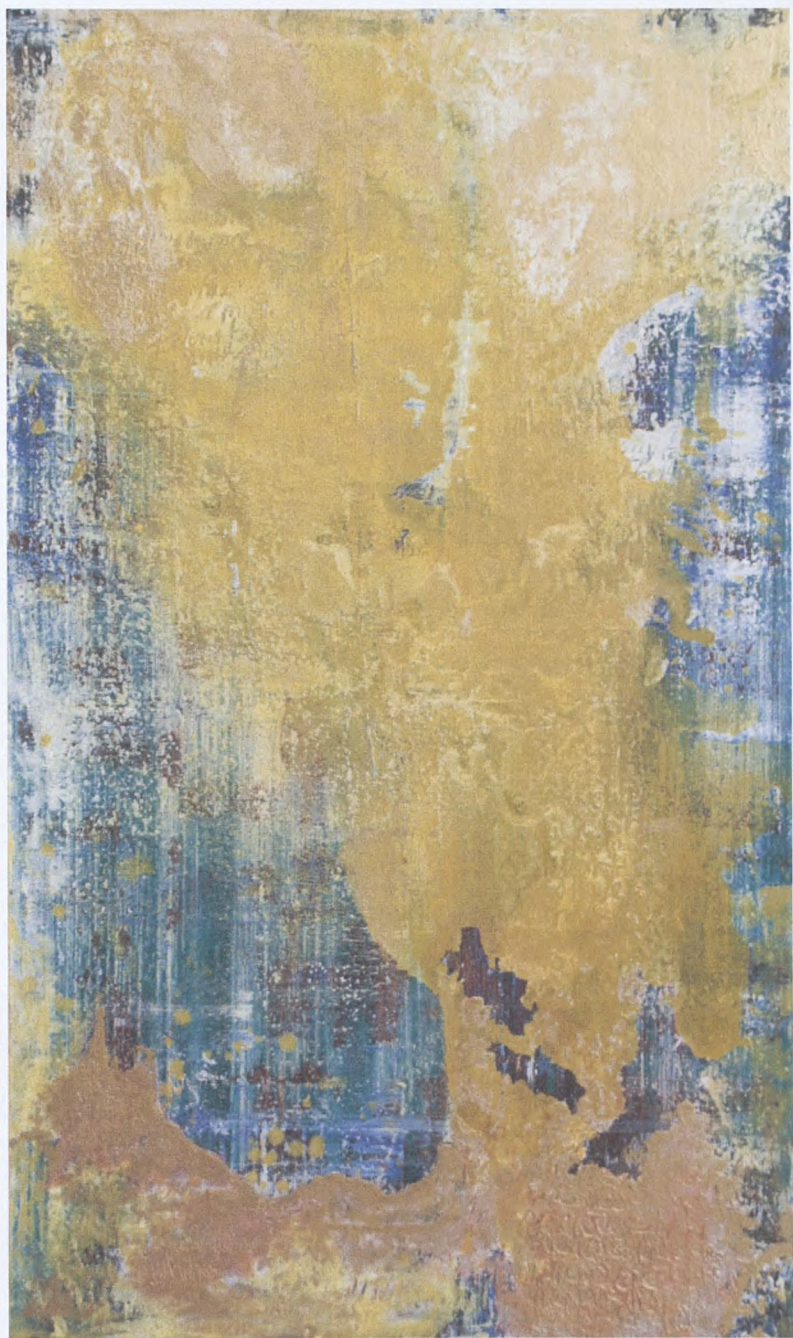
ARDEN XVI

IN THE PRAIRIE SNOW BY SUNSHINE KING

There's a body on the ground
cuddled in a creek bed, and behind it
is a crumpled track covered with
blood. There are footprints
clustered like baby steps under
the purple morning, and as the
color pales the footsteps spread
out to form a patterned line,

dashing red flecks on the frozen plane.
White flared light shines on the smudged
dots and dilute them to the shade of
rust, and the steps revert into a sluggish
trail next to a soiled purple sled
smeared clean of fingerprints. There is a
different footprint on the sled's surface,
placed where the plastic toy is pushed forward.

The sled leaves a two-lined impression
that glides up the slope of a dead hill,
and leads to an evenly paved road.
Turn left and there is black tire burns,
blood, and fibers from the sled that's
sized for a trunk. Turn right and there is
the broadly curved asphalt path with a
car roaring towards the rippling white horizon.



ARDEN XVI

NICK BY MEGAN ALLEN



Cursed is the womb
that bears the child
with pain, for the skull
itself is cursed
to case so much mass,
its horrid, large shape
is the greatest, the first,
and the worst of the bursts;
the soft-spotted skull
protects and enshrines
that which creates
and bestows every hurt,
and as the bone thickens
it will come to protect
vast swarms of thought
that cannot be dispersed.

As big as it is,
as much pain as it's caused
the skull has more yet to grow.
The brain must be large; there's much to be done.
And with mass so great
it may wonder one day
why the mother should suffer so much.
For the sake of the brain? for the sake of
the brain?

Cursed is the skull
that cases the brain
with harm, for the brain
itself is cursed,
and the skull, on a day,
may find itself striking
a wall,
for its cursed charge
is ready to burst.

ARDEN XVI

RED RUN BY ALYSSA HUDSON

Joana didn't belong in that hotel.

On that Monday, she should have been at her apartment on East Bradford Street preparing to meet Natalie at a cozy restaurant downtown. It was their two year anniversary, and she was expected in a few hours. But instead of trying on potential outfits for the evening's dinner, she boarded the elevator of the Red Run Hotel, a single overnight suitcase in hand, and jammed the button for the fourth floor with her thumb. The elevator doors slid close, and the numbers above the door blinked as the elevator ascended. When it stopped, she retrieved a keycard from her pocket and exited. She hesitated right outside the doors, glancing right and then left with a frown. The suitcase in her hand felt heavy, even though there wasn't anything substantial inside, and she readjusted the handle in her hand, gathering the energy needed to force her legs to move.

Taking one trembling step right, Joana proceeded. Checking the numbers as she went past, she eventually reached the door of the appointed room, but just to be sure, she reached into her pants pocket for a familiar business card. Sure enough, the same room number was written in black on the upper right of the well-worn cream card. She'd made it.

With clammy hands, she slid the keycard through the door's card reader, and the light on the mechanism blinked from red to green. The door clicked open, and Joana turned the knob and pushed open the door.

The room she entered was done in pale pinks and oranges, and the cream-colored comforter on the bed looked plush and soft, reminding her of the handmade paper Natalie kept stocked in seemingly every place she occupied. The sheer curtains shifted in the breeze. The tiny, square window was cracked just enough to let in a tiny stream of humid Georgia air. There was even a vase of flowers, fresh-cut tulips, on a small table near the window, and altogether, the aspects of the room made for a lavish scene.

It wasn't a bad place to die.

Joana removed her simple black heels, placing them beside the door. The sunlight filtering in illuminated the whole space, coming in through the curtains, and somehow, the brightness of the room amplified the uncomfortable feeling that had settled throughout Joana's entire body. Still, she pressed on, forcing herself to unzip the suitcase. It was too late to stop now, she reminded herself over and over. Inside her case, there was a navy blue dress in a clear garment bag, a plain black purse, and a zipped travel bag. She ignored those items in favor of a small, stab-stitched journal tucked into the side pocket of the suitcase.

Leaving the case, she went and sat on the bed, flipping the book open. Almost every page was full of notations, all in her own barely-legible, slanted handwriting. The scale of the notes varied from page to page, and some pages were completely filled with runny black ink while others were done in pencil. Every now and then, she caught a glimpse of

writing done in bright red or ugly, faded violet. Some were a horrible, mismatched combination of multiple pen inks and pencil, and in some parts, lines of text were scratched out so thoroughly that there were little trenches in the paper. The organization, Perennial, had offered a data pad to hold all her personal information, since that was the easiest and fastest way to do things, but Joana had refused.

Natalie had given her the book for their six-month anniversary, and almost every element of the book bore evidence of her girlfriend's touch, from the pressed violet blossoms embedded in the heavy paper cover to the handmade paper within. Sometimes Natalie ordered her papers from another papermaker, to save time, but for Joana, she had done them herself. She had even sprayed each individual page with her preferred brand of perfume, some celebrity-inspired scent Joana couldn't hope to pronounce, and even after all the writing she had done in the past year, the scent of Natalie lingered, heavy and real on each sheet.

Joana loved the gift, even if writing in it sometimes made her sick with guilt, and she felt the least she could do was put it to good use before the end.

Now, each of the two-hundred some pages was full to the brim with every fact Joana could think of about herself. Perennial had sent over a rough list of things to include, and thus, the first few pages were filled with the basics—facts about her family, her schooling, her childhood. From there, the focus was less concrete, more about Joana's personal relationships and feelings than the facts. There were anecdotes from her childhood and stories her parents had told her numerous times. She spent pages and pages talking about Natalie, carefully detailing all the things she loved about her. All the fights they'd ever had. They were all necessary to know, and she had carried the book with her almost everywhere, never knowing when she'd think of something that might be important. Thirty pages, front and back, and she'd forgotten how to be shy. For this to succeed, the book had to be an extension of herself. It had been painful to carry a reminder of what she intended to do, but it was worse to do nothing at all.

Joana flipped through the pages, never pausing long enough to read a complete thought. In truth, she'd never really gone back to reread any part of the book. Each word made her feel raw and embarrassed, and she hated the look of her writing, all the mistakes crossed out in black. In all her other journals, she'd try to keep the pages perfect. She tried to sound deep, tried to make her letters small and uniform. Whenever she made a mistake or complained about something she later thought was trivial, she'd tear the page out. But the rough edge of the paper inside the journal she could never fully remove, the evidence she always screwed up and never had anything interesting to say, always kept her from continuing a journal through to the end. Instead, she'd buy another journal, and the cycle would repeat. Natalie had admitted, four months after gifting the book to Joana, that she was a little upset that Joana wasn't using the book after all the hard

work she'd poured into it. But it had been too beautiful to screw up, and Joana still hadn't had anything interesting to say. It had seemed wrong to use such a beautiful gift when she didn't have anything important to put in it.

She sifted through the pages until she heard the click of the door unlocking. Joana closed the book, and her eyes turned to the opening door. Ford, their representative, entered wearing a charcoal suit with no tie, and he carried a stocky brown case, though its weight didn't appear to be a burden for him at all. Ford's dark hair was short and neat, and he walked and smiled without a care. He and Joana had spoken on the phone a few times, discussing terms and procedures, and it had been clear by his laidback demeanor and their conversations that Ford had been in the game for a while. He had anticipated each of her questions, and Ford always seemed patient when answering her nervous questions.

Leigh, a grey-haired woman, walked through after Ford, her steps slow and careful, and her brown eyes darted about the room as soon as she entered, cataloging each detail. She was a head shorter than Joana, but she stood tall and straight. Her gaze became stuck on Joana when she first caught sight of her, and Joana stared, unable to summon a smile.

"You're here," Leigh blurted out. She flushed and looked embarrassed as soon as the words left her mouth. "I'm sorry. It's just, on the phone..." She let out a frustrated breath. "You sounded like you were reconsidering." Leigh wrung her hands as she spoke, a nervous smile spread across her face.

Joana was trembling, so much that it was noticeable in almost every line of her body. She wanted to lie; it would have been easier—probably nicer, too—to deny any of her doubt, but it didn't seem fair to Leigh. "I was," she admitted. "I've never really been great at making decisions." Joana smiled, feeling the sudden beginnings of an urge to cry bubble up in her chest. Her fingernails dug into the cover of the book in her hand to anchor herself.

Leigh's mouth opened, the smallest of noises exiting before she closed it again. She swallowed. "But you're here," she said. Joana knew what she probably wanted to ask but felt that Leigh was afraid what her answer might be. Ford had relayed a bit about Leigh's background to Joana and more importantly, her enthusiasm at the idea of starting over on a-not-quite-blank slate. Wealth couldn't cure old age, and Leigh was a driven woman. One lifetime hadn't afforded her enough opportunities, but this was her chance to start again, in a world that Leigh described as more "progressive" than her own.

"Yeah," Joana said. "Yeah, I'm here; I'm still in." Leigh looked even more uncomfortable with that lukewarm answer, and she shifted her stance and pursed her lips. Her eyes darted to Ford as if seeking guidance; however, the man was taking the lamp down off of the bedside table to make room for his case and didn't seem to be paying attention to the women's conversation.

"Are you?" Leigh asked, her eyes tired but not unkind. Her words were patient, but there was an edge of disappointment to them, as if she was waiting for Joana to chicken out. Ford had admitted, without much pressing, that close to fifty percent of their clients didn't follow through. Perennial, therefore, refused to touch a client's payment until the full service was rendered. They refunded up to sixty-five percent, depending on the reason for the failed transition.

Joana was tempted. She could go home to her apartment, could even go to dinner with Natalie and celebrate the past two years. She could pretend everything was fine. Apparently, she hadn't done such a terrible job. No one suspected anything was seriously wrong with her. She could forget about the Red Run, Leigh, and Ford. Despite everything, Joana could leave, but she had the book, and even if she got rid of it, she'd still have *those* mornings, the ones where she felt so sick of herself that she couldn't bear to get out of bed. She'd have those days where she cried over nothing, days where Joana'd tell Natalie she was too sick or too busy to see her because she couldn't deal with anyone seeing her. There was no reason for it. No explanation. She had fantastic parents and a close circle of supportive friends. Natalie was far from perfect, but she was wonderful. They were happy together, on Joana's really good days. Joana had done well in college. Her job at the Customer Service department at the local phone company sucked, but it paid the bills. All and all, there was nothing. But sometimes, that made it feel even worse.

"Joana," Leigh said, stepping closer. "It's okay." The tone of Leigh's voice suggested it wasn't okay at all, but Leigh didn't sound angry. It was almost as if she was expecting this outcome. "This is a little crazy to begin with, and you're still really young—"

Ford butted in: "What's this? You thinking of opting out, Miss Bird?" The man had opened his case, but after hearing their line of conversation, he stopped his set-up process and turned to Joana. He still smiled, even though Joana might be seconds away from telling them she was too scared, too guilt-ridden to continue.

Swallowing with a grimace, Joana tried to calm her breathing and *think*. It occurred to her that Leigh should be pissed at her for doing this, for being indecisive at such a critical point. Leigh had paid, and it was obvious she really wanted her second chance, one she would only get through Joana. They had an agreement, and Leigh, from the very beginning, had been very accommodating. She had promised to move in with Natalie, to continue her monthly visits to her parents in South Carolina. Hell, the woman had promised to continue her tutoring gig at one of the local middle schools early each Saturday morning at least for another quarter.

"No," she said, forcing the word out before she could talk herself out of it. Leigh jumped at the volume of the word, and Ford stared, his eyes examining her face hard for a few minutes, before he turned back to his case. He began working again.

Leigh stared, too. She still appeared unsettled, but she was no longer wringing her

hands. "If you're sure," she said. "This is really what you want?"

"Yeah," Joana replied, speaking before Leigh could finish her question. Leigh's eyes narrowed, and she clasped her hands in front of her. She looked as if she wanted to argue, but Joana shut her down. When she continued, she tried to sound decisive and confident. "I *want* this." She took a deep breath, fussing with her hair absently. "I mean, I'm not jumping for joy about this or anything. This is way beyond screwed up. But I want it." She took a shuddering breath, feeling a little of the tension leave her body. "I don't want to be like this anymore." Joana covered her face with one of her hands, disgusted that she had started to cry, and turned her face away from Leigh.

"You won't be like *anything* anymore," Leigh whispered.

"Why're you trying to talk me out of it?" Joana muttered, smearing the tears into her skin in an attempt to wipe them away. "If I back out, you lose everything. Shouldn't you be trying to convince me rather than—"

Leigh took a half-step back. "I'm not going to talk someone into committing suicide!" She shook her head, the gray strands swaying at the movement, and began to wring her hands again. She looked pale, and there were drops of sweat on her face and neck. Joana, in turn, scrubbed at her face with her palm. She didn't trust her voice. Joana suspected that if she tried to speak at all, she'd probably start to cry, and she had promised herself she wouldn't let anyone see that, especially not before she died.

Ford clucked his tongue, interrupting their emotional debate, "We avoid that word."

"What do you call it then?" Leigh asked, frustrated. There were splotches of ugly red coloring her face.

Ford answered, "Consensual body snatching." He sounded serious.

To Joana's surprise, Leigh laughed. But it was a short, shocked thing that suggested Leigh didn't find the comment humorous. Still, Ford continued on despite Leigh's reaction, more playful now, "Well, I call it that anyway. Company policy is to call it a 'substitution' or a 'switch,' but those always make me think of the *Parent Trap*."

"What difference does it make what you call it?" Leigh said, hands sweeping her hair up above her ears. She took a deep breath, eyes fluttering closed. "I'm encouraging someone to commit suicide for me. That's what this is."

Ford shrugged, "This was never a very *moral* arrangement, just a consensual one." He was now taking a set of headpieces from inside the case. "Joana wants to die. You want a new life. That's it." He turned from his work and smiled at Leigh, his white teeth visible. "It would be best for both of you to stop thinking beyond that. You'll be a lot happier if you do."

"I imagine the money has nothing to do with it either," Leigh said, disgust permeating each word.

Joana shuddered and cut in, "Stop. Let's just get on with it. Leigh, we've been talking

about this for over a year—”

“We never discussed *why* you were doing this,” Leigh said. “I was told I could only ask you in person, and even then, Perennial...advised against it.”

Joana wiped at her eyes and patted the dampness from her cheeks. She was exhausted; she wasn’t supposed to have to explain this. “What’s the point?” she interrupted. “It’ll just make you feel shitty about the whole thing, and there’s no point.” She took a deep, shuddered breath.

“Worry about tonight. You’ll be having dinner with Natalie at seven-thirty. Please don’t ruin this. I mean, how many chances are you going to get to be twenty-seven again?”

The room went silent save for the sound of Ford shifting his machinery.

Finally, Leigh spoke, sounding ashamed, “Y-yes. You’re right.” She exhaled. Inhaled. Her eyes did not meet Joana’s.

“Why don’t you tell Joana what you’re going to do for dinner,” Ford prompted. “I’m almost ready.”

So Leigh laid out the scene. Joana would arrive right on time to find Natalie seated, smiling in their favorite booth in the back of the restaurant right under that god-awful neon sunset painting. There’d be a kiss, a slight clasp of hands, fingers soothing Natalie’s tired hands. Then they’d sit, side-by-side in the booth, legs touching and hands entwined until the food came. Joana would order her usual, the restaurant’s specialty soup, a seafood dish that came piled high with fresh cilantro and hot peppers. Natalie would order something new but would take her peppers since Joana had always refused to eat them. They’d eat and talk, and because it was their two year anniversary, they’d talk about themselves—Joana and Natalie. One happy little unit.

At the end of dinner, Joana would give her gift and finally say “yes.” She had danced around answering the question of sharing an apartment for a long time, citing one excuse or another. There was no way she could have kept the switch a secret while sharing a living space, and the idea of being in such an intimate arrangement with anyone—even Natalie—made her sick with nervousness. Natalie had seemed put off by Joana’s reluctance to give a straight answer, but also seemed to understand how important the idea of living together was to Joana. Lately, she barely mentioned the notion at all, leaving it up to Joana to bring up the subject again. And tonight, she would.

Or rather, Leigh would.

While Leigh described dinner, Ford set up his workstation. The brown case he’d brought in was open on the nightstand, and inside was a mess of wires and lights with tiny, almost illegible labels beneath them. The wires were all coiled around a central mechanical structure—a small silver dome with a slot at the top for a memory disc.

Joana never glanced at Ford’s case; her attention was fixed on Leigh, on the way she described the night ahead of her. The more Leigh talked, the faster and easier the words

came. She looked more at ease, and she wore a small smile now. There was no more trembling, and Leigh's bubbling excitement for her new life made most of the cold dread flee from Joana.

"Sounds like it'll be a charming night," Ford said. The man was still smiling. "Are you ready, Joana? You're up first." He had removed his suit jacket and had rolled up his sleeves. He was still in high spirits despite the near-meltdowns he'd almost witnessed, and his casual, almost playful attitude made it easier for Joana to proceed, to push past any lingering negativity that still existed inside her. She glanced away from Leigh and turned to Ford.

"How do you want me?" Joana said.

Ford let out a snort of a laugh before replying. "Lie on the bed—but keep your head close to the edge. The cords they give me are always too damn short." Joana did as she was told, and as if entranced, Leigh moved to the other side of the bed, hesitating before sitting at the other edge. She reached forward, her movements sluggish, before resting her hand on Joana's shoulder. The headpiece Ford had in hand were not unlike the old style headphones. Instead of speakers, however, flat stems curled outwards, and each stem had a tiny metal piece attached at the end of one side.

From his pants pocket, Ford retrieved a bottle filled with translucent fluid, and he loaded the syringe neither woman had noticed on the nightstand. Without speaking, Joana offered her arm. She didn't need to know what it was. In a little while, it would be Leigh's problem.

"We used to do this without medication," Ford said, massaging the area he intended to inject with calloused fingers. He paused and tilted his head, as if thinking about how to continue. With a brief smile, a flash of almost menacing teeth, he let out a huff and shook his head. "Let's just say things go much smoother with meds," he finally said.

"How long does it last?" Joana's eyes flickered to Leigh, concerned. There wasn't a large window of time for mistakes.

"If all goes well, she'll make the dinner," Ford soothed.

Joana nodded once and turned her head towards Leigh. "Please, don't screw this up," she begged, grabbing Leigh's arm and squeezing with all her might. "I know I'm asking a lot—especially since you're the one paying—but...please. Just stick to what you promised." She stared up at Leigh, her eyes wide and keen, and her nails bit into the old woman's flesh even through the sleeve of her plum-colored jacket.

"I will," Leigh said, patting the young woman's hand. "I don't break my promises." Joana stared at her for a few moments before drawing her hand back. Her other hand, which had never stopped clutching her book, stretched out to Leigh.

Joana smiled. "It's everything," she said. "Don't know if it'll make sense, but hopefully it'll help, at least a little." She laughed as Leigh took it into her hands, her eyes bright.

The drugs had kicked in. "Sorry 'bout the later stuff. I tried to write so you'd understand, but my thoughts were all over the place. I just wanted to get as much down as possible, you know? I couldn't really keep up with my head so it's all very messy. Sorry." Joana didn't sound sorry, but Leigh nodded, her smile disappearing and reappearing. The wrinkles on her forehead seemed to multiply, and she squeezed the book in her hand.

Ford spoke, "We're clear to start. Say when, Joana."

"Leigh," Joana began before pausing. Her eyes closed, and her mouth crinkled with glee. "Joana," she amended. "Happy anniversary."

Ford laughed, "That all? I'd hate for her to miss her dinner because you wanted to chit-chat all night." His fingers hovered over the main switch that would start the process of downloading Joana's memories onto the disc.

A pink-faced Joana nodded, and the switch fell. The three were silent as the machine began its work. From what Joana understood of the process (which wasn't much), it downloaded from the brain in sections. Visual memories, aural memories, tactile memories. The device downloaded them to a disc to make way for Leigh. Lights flashed on and off, too quick to keep track of. One green light fell steady. Joana's body seemed to sink further into the bed, and her eyes ceased moving, glazing over.

She drifted through thoughts of those education films in high school, the ones that went through the signs of depression. One sign, she had always remembered. *Someone who's suicidal might say something like, "I want to sleep forever."* Joana had laughed with friends about that one, at the campy actors and overdramatic reading of the line. The actor, a boy around fourteen or so, had worn a red and white striped shirt, and his eyes were down-cast. He had clung to his book bag as he admitted to his mom that he was tired. *"I just want to go to sleep and never wake up,"* he had said, his lip trembling. It was so blunt and obvious; Joana had never understood.

Another light stopped blinking—then another.

Joana knew the feeling at twenty-seven. There was heaviness in her limbs when she went to bed nowadays, and she dreaded closing her eyes sometimes because it seemed like she could never sleep enough to keep her body and her mind satisfied. There was too much to worry about when she was awake. But now, despite the guilt lingering, she felt something like peace settle over her mind. She was aware, in an abstract way, of her breathing—its steady, constant rhythm. The worries that plagued her disappeared into the fog, and Joana found herself lulled to sleep by the quiet, by the expanding emptiness.

Eventually, there wasn't enough in her head anymore; she didn't think or feel anything. Instead, she slept, knowing there wasn't anything to worry about. There would be no painful mornings spent wondering if she could find the strength to get up. Finally, it was done.

The last few lights took twenty minutes to calm, and at last, there was a high-pitched

mechanical beep that signified the download was done.

Leigh broke the quiet, "She's gone?"

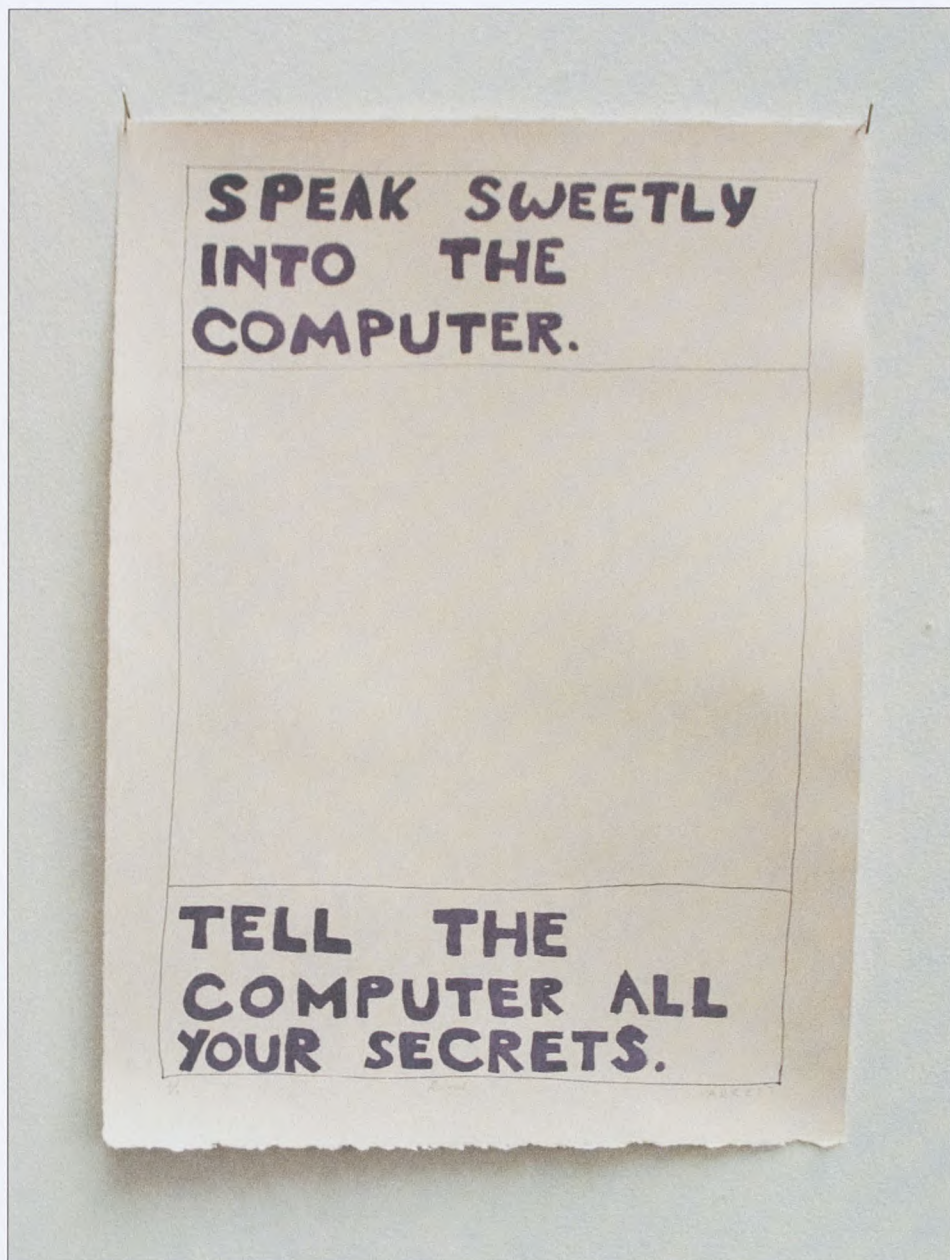
"Not yet," Ford answered. He pressed the release on the memory disc slot at the top of the dome. "I have to destroy the disc first." Leigh nodded and waited for him to do so. Instead, he gestured for her to come to his side of the bed, and he took a second headpiece into hand. "It's best to do this fresh. You understand how this works, right? Same initial procedure—but I upload your disc into her body." He tilted his head in the direction of Joana's empty shell as he spoke. "Then, dinner." Leigh nodded more times than necessary, and Ford's amusement seemed to intensify.

"No injections, doctor?"

Ford shook his head, "If I was a doctor, we wouldn't be doing this in a damn hotel." Leigh started but didn't speak. "Now just sit there next to Joana and make sure you lean *away* from her. This should go rather quickly." He set the headpiece on Leigh's head, and they went through the same sequence. The lights went solid, and the old woman went still. Then, she pitched sideways, her body falling away from Joana, onto the bed. Ford prepared, in blissful silence, for the second phase.



RECORD BY JOSHUA JARRETT



Stubbing over fifty carcinogens
into concrete stair. The dogs

brought her out in robe
and slippers, little nose red
with sleep. My coffee the least

shocking and her face drains,
imagines my limp body: blue
and rot. Dear god, I've let
so much go with you. *So much.*

Leashes tug her to the door, tails
apologetic, but where was I?
Left once more— my spotted lungs
and mom asleep for days, calls
with need and *please return.*

ARDEN XVI

HERITAGE BY BRANDI FORD

Blood flows through veins
passed from mother and father to child
before them, grandparents lived
and even great-grandparents,
but yet I have no heritage.

I am too White to claim Black ancestors
too tan to celebrate Irish roots
Eyes are too blue call upon Creek parentage
No pride in being a White Southerner
Therefore, I have no heritage.

I come from The Deep South.
I come from the hills of Ireland.
I come from the tribe of Creek.
I come from the African slaves.
I come only from America.

All of these people are my history.
Each paring of man and woman led to me
choices made, races joined to make something new.
My family history is copious
yet I have no heritage.

All of this led to nothing.
Each generation diluted, pieces lost
till nothing was left.
I belong to no culture or race
so I have no heritage.

I am lost in America.
I am lost in the history of slavery.
I am lost in the stolen land of the Creeks.
I am lost in the Irish immigrants.
I am lost in the stigma of the South.

So many pieces created a new thing.
A life with so many histories
that it has no culture,
something different was born
that has no heritage.

ARDEN XVI

BROTHERS? TRAVELING TOGETHER? BY JOSHUA JARRETT





ARDEN XVI

THE CHAPEL IN THE WOODS BY RYAN KRAFTHEFER



We play with the idea of going to church. Wearing fine clothing, swishing mouthwash inside our cheeks, but it's never happened.

My mother used to wake me at the crack of dawn on Sundays, dunk me in warm water and tell me to scrub every inch of my skin. As if it were a sin to be dirty. No matter how hard I tried, I could not be clean enough.

Your mother made huge breakfasts to lure you out of bed, bought you dresses with flowery prints and oversized bows. She made you promises of after-church visits from your friends and baking sessions. You didn't forget her comb pulling the tangles from your hair, still jerking after you asked her to stop.

But now we have sleep to catch up on, deli sandwiches to eat, comfortable clothing and pillow-fluffed hair to wear proudly. Then, of course, the dishwasher to start, the laundry to do, the living room floor to vacuum. We do half, throwing clothes into the washer and starting the dishwasher, then disappear.

Sunday afternoons mean time spent in the bookstore on 78th Street, the shelves hiding us from chores and Monday morning work, the possibility of us attending church. We stay together, our backs curving over ourselves, so that we won't be seen by fellow browsers. Backs can do that, you know. Our elbows stay locked beneath our ribs, as we flip pages in novels and DIY books.

You pause over an outdoor design book.

We should paint the back porch next weekend.

I glare.

You're right. Maybe this summer. But if we do it, then we should paint it cherry red.

I take the book from your hand and slide it back on the shelf.

Next section.

Church attendance was marked on my mother's calendar, under my father's hairline. *If you don't want to go to church, then you can paint the front of the house.* So my father bought me the paint. I hoped my sunburn would last until the next weekend, so I could skip out again. Morning comes too soon on Sunday, and as I sat in my pressed pants and crisp button up, I inquired about what exactly God meant when he said Sunday was a day to rest. *Resting to me is being in bed.* My father whacked me over the head with his newspaper.

And your dad read you Bible stories before you went to sleep. That's where your love for horror began. You were strong enough to keep nightmares at bay, but it didn't keep the stories from sticking. So you had to press them beneath your spine where the middle school girls couldn't find them. At home, you'd drape them over your mother's face to dry out, promise her that you didn't sin. *Not today. Not ever.*

Our fingers left their prints on thick pages of history books, mainly ones on World War II, because being a Nazi unleashed the worst in people and being a Jew meant having only your back to hide you. We sympathized with the gas chambers. *So God gave his only*

begotten son.

High school treated me poorly, even now scars pit my face. I blame the stress of Catholic school, the girls in their knee-high socks. My father had *the* talk with me, but it went like this: *Marriage before sex.*

Your mother tightened her hold on you, your conservative dress. Boys managed to only see your breasts behind that turtleneck blouse, your cut-in waist. Handing out blow-jobs behind the gym became the going thing. Your mom accepted your tutoring excuses, the community service activities.

Romance novels take up a lot of our time in the bookstore, our eyes drooping over the new ideas. We convince ourselves that our marriage could be steamier. But first, we need caffeine.

I always buy the coffee, both with double shots of espresso. You want extra cream, so I watch them to make sure they get it right. They never do.

Please put more cream in this.

The man behind the counter still doesn't remember me, but maybe that's because he refuses to notice. His apron's never clean, so I say he must be working hard.

My father thought that working tirelessly could replace church. When I finally escaped Catholic school, he put me to work. My mother made me join the youth group so she could scoff at the other people in the group who weren't as smart as I was. That was not a sin, she said, as long as you put *God bless 'em* behind your remark.

Guilt eroded your spine. With nothing to hide you, sleep wouldn't come. You laid on your back, eyes wide open, reciting Bible verses to the grooves in your ceiling. The grooves didn't respond. Not even the presence of high school girls could keep you from spouting off about morality, how Jesus belongs in the deepest parts of our hearts.

Now we grip our cups in the *Christian Living* section, balancing a book between us. There are lists of sinful things in this one, all of which we've done. In another, we find that we might possibly make it to heaven. *My mother says this.* Our fingers land on passages and quotes. We all might be going to hell.

Your mother begged us to get married in your childhood church by your childhood preacher. My parents wanted the same, but in their church with their priest. We picked the botanical garden south of our college and called on an old friend to marry us instead.

Halfway through our coffees, we drift into the CD section where the hardcore collectors and men in classy attire shop. No one buys overpriced CDs in a bookstore except for them, and kids who want something badly enough. We know what we like, slip headphones over our ears to hear samples. CDs from middle school with yellowed coverings find us, and we lip sync in the middle of the store. You turn to me, your lips open over a bar of music, your eyes say: *God is here.*

Our cardboard coffee cups hit the rim of the garbage can before falling in. The sugar

that settled in the last sip now sits on our tongues, weighing us down. Our hands join while we circle the store for the last time.

College brought freedom and distance. Our parents' calls only held so much weight against what we wanted. We wedged so much resentment between us and them that holidays seemed the only appropriate time to visit. Then we met, and God didn't seem so far away.

I need my scrubs washed for work tomorrow, scrap together enough money for lunch. Your OCD will drive you to lug the huge vacuum cleaner out of the hallway closet, plug it into the wall, and rake it across the carpet for nearly an hour. Tomorrow the scraps from your artwork will fleck it again.

There's your paperwork for sale's reports, and I'll sit beside you, paying the bills. We'll fold bread around peanut butter because the bookstore coffee has us half-full, but we really don't know if it's the coffee or the books we flipped through. We'll eat while we work, limbs slowly losing momentum, making it harder for the food to reach our mouths.

We'll hit our mattress, too tired to let the other know we're there.

It was a good Sunday, but maybe we'll go to church on the next one.

I find a way to wrap myself around you.

Yeah, maybe.

ARDEN XVI

CACKLE BY ADAM WHITE

Forever I fear I might laugh aloud
from the blackened hollows deep within:
the cackle casts a terrible shroud

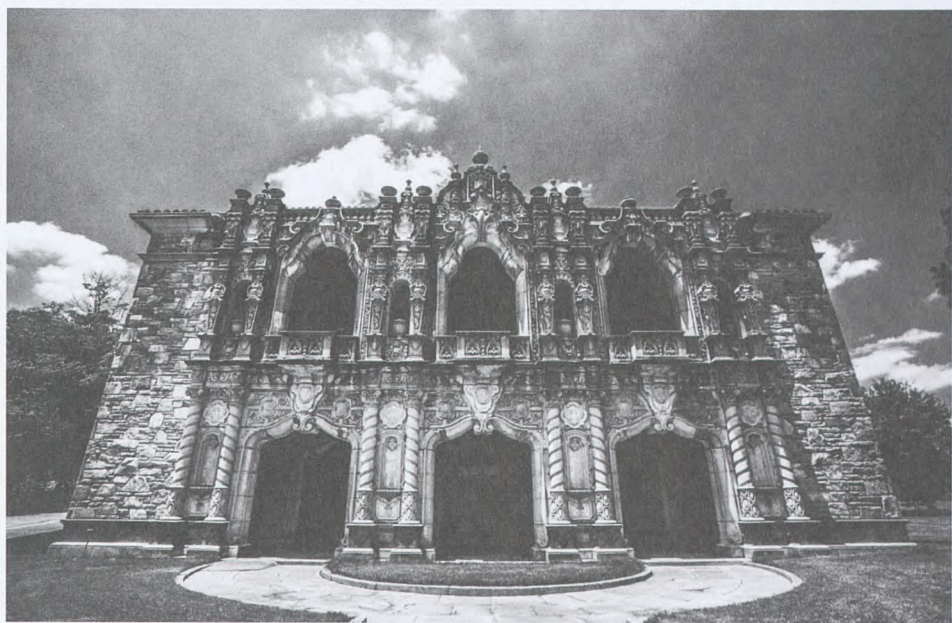
upon my mirth which must not be endowed
with the character of the cackle's sin.
Forever I fear I might laugh aloud.

For one who knows what my soul has allowed
to be made jest or who's heard the din
the cackle casts a terrible shroud.

My own heart shivers to hear it grow loud
from the low rattle at which it begins:
forever I fear I might laugh aloud.

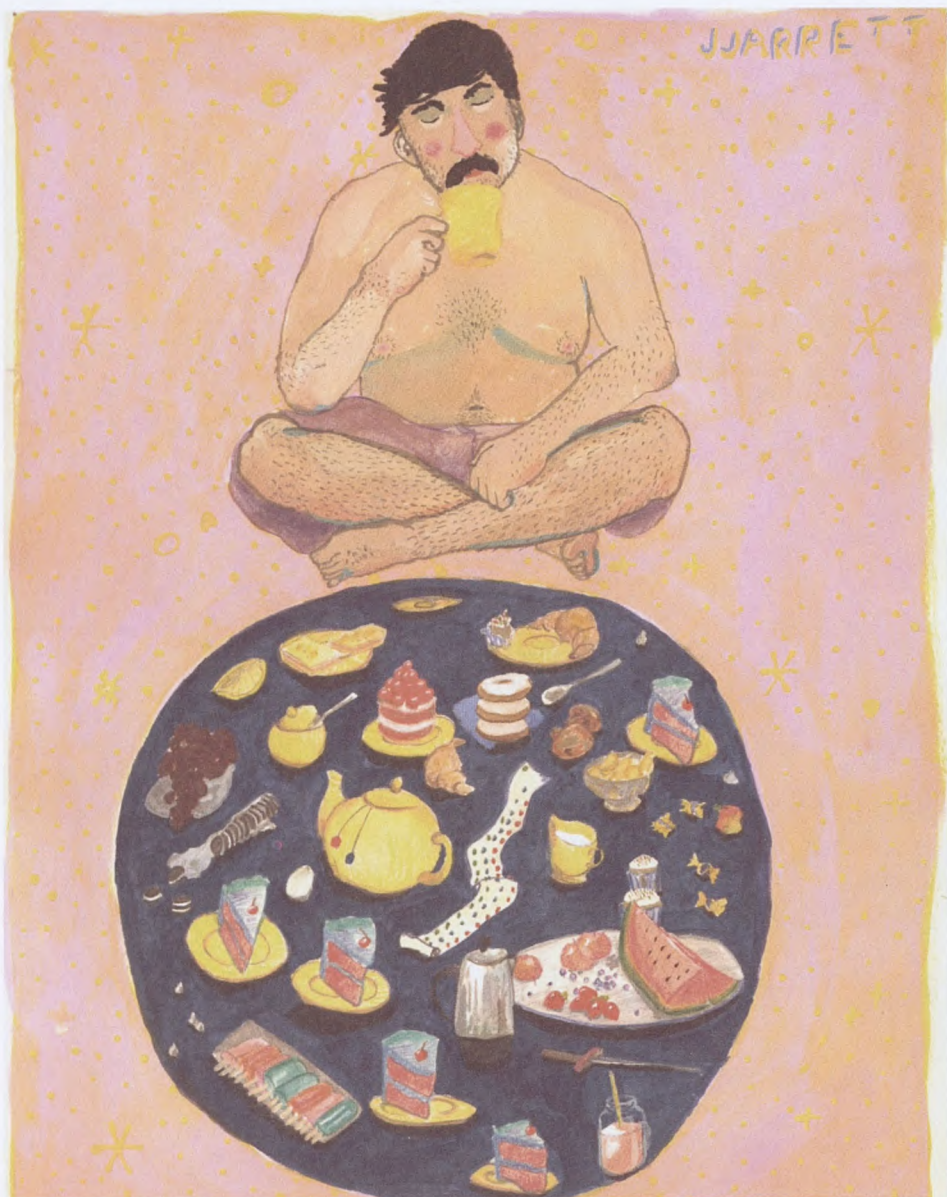
I've fallen to the floor in fits, unproud,
what shame to be seen, what shame it has been:
the cackle casts a terrible shroud.

My throat should be shut; my head should be bowed.
I hear in my snicker, the devil's my kin.
Forever I fear I might laugh aloud;
the cackle casts a terrible shroud.



ARDEN XVI

TEA TIME BY JOSHUA JARRETT



My mother goes into thrift stores
to reminisce and remember.
Sometimes she tells me
about the things she recognizes:
“We used to have a clock like that in our living room.”
The clock ticks back at her.
“Our family was one of the last on our street to get a tv.”
There is no resentment in her voice
since she rarely remembers anything bad.
“Grandmama used to collect this type of glassware.”
She runs her fingers over the
rose-colored glasses and plates,
and her eyes glaze over.
She’s done talking,
so I leave her alone to find
my own memories.

ARDEN XVI

STILL AWAKE THINKING BY ADAM WHITE

There had to be something I had to do.
Awake at four in the morning,
I took a shower.

Awake at four in the morning,
I was afraid, like
most nights, of turned faces, flickering eyes.

I was afraid like
when I was a child, a visionary,
Eye-fearing Christian.

When I was a child, a visionary,
worried dreamer, I dreamt my
mother's face turning

over and over again.

With nothing to do,
awake at four in the morning,
I took a shower:

Shivering amid the steam,
through seething jet and sudden stop,
the fear that nothing could be done,
this fear would not rinse off.



THE NAARTJIE MULTIMEDIA AWARD FOR EXPOSITORY WRITING

ARDEN XVI

NATIVE LAND BY KATHERINE RUSSELL

They were once America's greatest race, but now they are her poorest people. The Native American tribes, who once rode freely across the plains and stalked silently through dark forests, whose expanses knew only the bounds of continent and ocean, must now scratch out a living on the edges of society, their ancestral lands long ripped from their hands and blanketed by invaders. American Indians area study in contrasts, being the indigenous peoples of North America and ancient masters of the continent, while simultaneously constituting our poorest ethnic group today and most oft-forgotten people. Indeed, a nickname for Native Americans is "the Forgotten Minority". If questioned, the average citizen demonstrates little knowledge of the plight of our country's original owners. It's not something mentioned in presidential debates or day-to-day life. It's easy—and convenient—to forget injustices and blood sins committed long ago, to forget a people you scarcely see today. This great, collective forgetfulness that seems to enshroud the majority of Americans is the keystone in a struggle still being fought today. Native Americans are battling for the land rights to their sacred places—and losing. From daily struggles against oil and mining companies to an unresolved Supreme Court conflict over the Black Hills, places holy to a deeply scarred and damaged culture are being threatened daily, and few of us are taking notice.

Even if nothing else about the Native Americans is known to the population at large, most of us have some knowledge of the basic story of the American Indian's rise and fall, of how the whole of North America once compromised their vast domain, and of how swiftly they fell before the bayonets and diseases borne into their homeland by alien cultures. Their rapid demise, horribly fast already from maladies and frontier violence, was willfully accelerated by the United States government. The 1830 Indian Removal Act made legal exactly what its title suggested—seizure of tribal lands without compensation or consent. This bill, and countless others like it, allowed for the destruction of native peoples and cultures on a massive scale. Bloody, one-sided wars were fought from the east coast to the west, with one objective in mind: to remove the "Indian filth" from land the federal government believed should belong to white settlers. Whether this was accomplished with genocide or death marches such as the Trail of Tears mattered little to powerful men in Washington, so long as the inconvenience of original landowners was removed. As one can see today, they succeeded. We call tribal land ours, building our homes and shopping centers atop nameless soil, and think nothing of it. Native Americans now comprise less than 1.8% of the total United States population and retain sovereignty over their lands only on reservations, which in turn cover approximately 2.35% of the United State's total acreage, most of it desert or scrubland. In spite of their comparatively low numbers, over the past 50 years there has been an intense upwelling of tribal movements and a sense of renewed racial pride among many natives. This renewal of feeling has led many Native American activists who still keep the old religions or honor

traditional customs to seek increased land rights. Specifically, they seek rights to lands that have a spiritual or cultural significance for their people. And that's where things get messy.

Opponents of the Native Americans' crusade for land rights run the gamut from frustrated oil barons to politicians dedicated to the status quo—those focused on the material side of things. The most common argument against returning lands to the tribes is the simple fact that most of that land is now occupied, by either private citizens or national parks. Both groups are reluctant to relinquish their grip on the land—land they purchased or inherited, land they see as theirs. They are right to a point, certainly. Seizing private property without due cause is illegal and morally repugnant. However, very few if any of the Indians' land campaigns focus on areas now owned by independent citizens. Their battles are waged over public lands in danger of being sold to indifferent corporations, lands they rightfully owned and were promised rights to in the dark, shadowed depths of broken treaties that make up the federal government's track record with Native Americans. In the name of increasing revenue, the government periodically decides to auction off portions of public land, and they do so without any thought of the natives. Their purpose is to make profit off of the land, not to worry themselves over whether or not they should be auctioning the land in the first place—after all, it's theirs (through deceptive treaties and shattered promises) so they can do as they wish with it (paying no mind to how the property was acquired originally, or how spiritually significant it may be to native tribes.) It goes without saying the Native American tribes, being America's most money-strapped ethnic group, simply lack the funds to compete with multibillion dollar corporations who desire the land solely for the resources and potential income it promises them, and not at all for the spiritual significance of such a place.

A possible solution set forth to this issue, proposed first by the federal government, has been to provide tribes with monetary reimbursements for their lands in place of the actual lands themselves. This idea has its merits, as at least it would be some form of payment, and the government and private companies would be able to keep their property without appearing totally devoid of morals. However, this point of view has one serious flaw—it fails to take into account the opinions of the Native Americans themselves. They don't want the money. They want their sacred lands back, whole and intact. The tribes view money and the greed it sows as the dark heart of the problem. Take the Black Hills court case, also known as the Black Hills Land Claim, for example. The Black Hills, an area in South Dakota famous for housing Mount Rushmore, comprises the Sioux Nation's most sacred ground and most fought-over territory. The Hills are rich in natural resources such as timber, minerals, and gold, the latter of which served as the original draw for settlers and caused the initial conflict between the natives and the United States government in this area. Following a series of bloody battles and broken or deceptive

treaties, the Sioux were forced onto barren-soiled Pine Ridge Reservation, while the invaders reaped profits from their stolen land. One hundred years later in 1980, after an intense court case known as *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, the Sioux were awarded \$106 million dollars by the Supreme Court in compensation for "seizure of property that was set aside for the use of the tribe," but refused the settlement. The Sioux insisted they would never accept money for land that was never for sale in the first place. Interest gathered on the land has now raised the value of the trust fund to \$1.3 billion, but still the Sioux refuse. They see dollar bills as irrelevant when compared with the value of property, holy property, that should by all rights still be theirs. The Sioux spat on the money and didn't get the land, but they're still fighting for acreage, even while the government sells the Hills piece by piece, chopping steadily away at the tribe's holiest ground.

"It's like someone stealing your car and then you having to pay to get it back," said one tribal lawyer concerning the Black Hills debacle. A more apt comparison, a more Christian analogy, would be another culture overtaking Bethlehem, evicting Jesus' followers, and selling the city block by block to faceless corporations who would eradicate the foundations of the city and destroy Christ's birthplace in search of oil. Those who felt a connection to the place, whose souls cried out for an end to the sacrilege, wouldn't be able to do anything about it. The conflict over Native Americans' holy lands and their rightful ownership is a spiritual matter, a moral one. It calls for empathy, for understanding, and for justice. Native Americans have been denied their sacred lands long enough. It's time to make amends, do what's right, and give it back.

Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* introduces readers to the psychological complexity that is produced from formulating a basis for a meaningful existence as an individual. Maggie, the focal character of the novel, depicts such difficulty as she struggles to contend with her manipulative environment. The people in her environment lack the understanding of middle-class values of the late nineteenth-century. However, Maggie is unique in this poor working-class society. While other characters embrace the working-class moral system that is often degraded further by distinguishing between publicly acceptable behavior and private actions, Maggie develops a unique identification with middle-class values. Often through the use of silence and visual hints, Crane demonstrates Maggie's view of her current situation, one that she wishes to escape. Maggie fails to find her own escape from the degraded environment that surrounds her. Therefore, she turns to another character, Pete, to give her an escape and make her existence meaningful. Pete soon betrays her trust, destroying the hope she had of eluding her perceived meaningless existence and leading to her moral and social fall. Ultimately, this fall results in Maggie's suicide. By using an existential psychoanalysis, this paper will argue that Maggie failed to find personal meaning in her own existence which led to her inevitable fall and suicide.

In existential psychology, religion can provide an individual with purpose in their life, as they find meaning in the task of emulating God. This form of purpose is derived from cosmic meaning, where a person looks beyond themselves to define their place in the world. This identification often provides a moral guidebook based on a written belief system. Crane uses Christianity to provide the moral framework of the degenerate characters in *Maggie*. These characters use religion to give purpose to their existence, even when they do not strictly follow the moral guidelines, but the characters do not have a full understanding of the value system they are trying to uphold.

To start, it is important to note that Crane differentiates between morality that is publicly acceptable and actions that are performed privately. In the public eye, there is a role that has to be performed by individuals so they can appear socially acceptable. Based on this role-playing, Nazmi Al-Shalabi argues that members of the Johnson family "put on facades of conformity to please their neighbors who expect them to act in a certain manner" which leads to a loss of authenticity (Al-Shalabi, 199). For example, when Jimmy smacks his sister Maggie on the street, his father tells him to "leave yer sister alone on the street" (Crane 7). There is little care for the act of abuse itself as would be expected. Instead, the father only cares about the appearance it presents to their neighbors on the street. The Johnson family members create two identities for themselves, one that is private and the other public.

In the same method of role-playing, the Johnson family members emulate the moral standards of a Western-Christian society, at least their own understanding of these moral standards, while in public. Religion becomes a social role that the characters have to em-

brace, but their private actions do not meet the standards that are set in public. Maggie's mother, Mary, presents the reader with public against private actions in terms of religion. Mary is an alcoholic and verbally abusive character. She criticizes Maggie for her decision to leave their family with Pete, and Mary mocks Maggie when she returns after Pete rejects her. However, when Mary is confronted with Maggie's death, she takes on the role of a religiously righteous mother. Mary says that Maggie will have to be judged for her sins in front of the Lord. She expresses that "yeh'll fergive her" and "I'll fergive her" (Crane 58). Mary places herself in the position of a judging force. She does not see fault in her own dealings with Maggie and the fact that she did not forgive Maggie herself when she was given the opportunity. Mary implies that she understands the importance of religiously guided morality and can judge Maggie based off of her own understanding. In her own mind, Mary is a woman of religion and her existence is guided by the values of Christianity. Therefore, even if she loses her authenticity, she uses religion to give her existence meaning and justify her treatment of Maggie.

Maggie is the one family member that does not put on a mask of conformity because she needs to maintain her core belief system. She truly understands morality and the redemptive power of religion; and after her fall, she looks to religion to remove her from the degraded position that she finds herself in on the streets. After being rejected by Pete, Maggie wanders the streets and comes across a man of God, and Maggie "had heard of the Grace of God and she decided to approach him" (Crane 51). She looks to this Holy figure to redeem herself and reestablish her identity as a character of middle-class Christian morality. The man of God rejects her because he did not "know that there was a soul before him that needed saving" (Crane 51). Maggie could not play the role of a soul who needed to be saved. Again, there is the indication that Maggie must look outside herself when justifying her existence, but religion rejects her and she is left with no valuable meaning to give her existence a purpose. She is finally confronted by a "huge fat man," who Joseph S. Salemi argues is a representation of the hellish environment and corruption that Maggie is now a part of (Salemi 59). This devilish fat man becomes a comparison to her own existence. He was a man of "disorder" with "beer-drops," a symbol of alcoholism, on his mustache (Crane 53). Seeing the corruption within herself through this man, Maggie sees that she has truly fallen, and death becomes her only way out of this existence.

Another form of cosmic meaning is for an individual to feel as though the small role they play is significant in the overall meaning of the Universe. The difference between public and private behavior becomes an important factor in role-playing outside of religion. Crane uses this to depict the slum environment in *Maggie*. These roles can be both positive and negative as long as the role for an individual gives them a purpose. For example, Jimmie takes on the role of a honorable and prideful family redeemer when he

confronts Pete about ruining his sister. Jimmie's decision is intensified when he hears women in the hall discussing Maggie and how "dere was somethin' wrong wid dat girl" (Crane 33). Jimmie enlists the help of a friend when confronting Pete. To the reader, Jimmie diminishes his shining role as an honorable redeemer because he is no longer confronting Pete alone. However, when it comes to understanding his own existence, Jimmie still embraces the same role. He finds meaning in what he perceives to be pride and honor.

Maggie fails to acquire a role that she deems appropriate for herself because she can only be herself in an environment that is cruel and destructive. Maggie can see the true nature of this environment. The famous line that she "blossomed in a mud puddle" depicts her higher moral character (Crane 16). She was different than the scummy street villains that filled her environment and her home. However, the higher moral quality that set her apart from others also increased her confusion about her own purpose, as she witnessed the brutal nature of those who surrounded her. Maggie grew up in a house of domestic violence that continued after her father died as she witnessed "a storm of crashes and curses" between Jimmie and Mary (Crane 30). Whether she was morally superior in any way or not, she still had to survive in this world. Her survival method was to turn to Pete to help her escape the poverty ridden streets she grew up in and find a purpose in life, but Pete could not provide Maggie with the role that she was suppose to play in the Universe. Pete only had a sexual purpose for Maggie. When Pete finally rejected Maggie, she is again left without a meaningful existence because she had placed her purpose in being Pete's lover. At this point, the reader could blame Maggie for her actions even if they were out of ignorance. However, by using other degenerate characters like Mary and Jimmie to criticize Maggie, Crane dares the reader to place themselves on the same level as these two family members.

Moving beyond the larger cosmic meaning, existential psychology emphasizes the discovery of a personal meaning to give purpose to an individual's existence. Often, a larger structure of morals or meaning based on a particular design such as religion can not provide an individual with the necessary contentment for living. For that reason, a person must "face the task of finding some direction to life without an external beacon" (Yalom 427). Crane's *Maggie* produces valid signs of personal meanings within the characters.

The utilization of pleasure becomes an effective method for individuals to find meaning in their existence. Pleasure can be derived from influences such as helping others or produced by bodily desires like sex as long individuals are provided with pleasure. For purpose to be provided, an individual just has to have a goal to aim towards that gives them a reason to continue their existence by gaining pleasure, or it provides an escape from the struggles they find in their daily lives.

For example, Crane uses alcohol to influence characters and to cover up their daily lives by providing a method of escape. Even if alcohol leads to violence, the violence becomes acceptable within the self because there is less care for the consequences of the violence. When Mary launches into a confrontation with the father, she is heavily influenced by alcohol that she was drinking "from a yellow-brown bottle" (Crane 9). Instead of removing herself from the struggle when she is clearly over-matched, she continues to push forward through the violence. Her struggle against the husband can be compared to her struggle in the environment, as she has to find a way to overcome them. Both the environment and her husband are abusive and chaotic, which pushes her to develop the same nature as her husband and others in this environment. To deal with this situation she finds herself in a continuous struggle for survival, Mary uses alcohol to cover up the difficulty and give herself more of a reason for existing in the present condition that she finds herself in.

Another form of personal pleasure used in *Maggie* is sexual lust, which provides both affection as well as a temporary release from the chaotic environment. For example, Pete's obsession with Nellie, a prostitute who seems to know Pete quite well, causes him to leave Maggie with another man. Pete does not see any fault in his decision. To him, Maggie should understand the situation. He is only looking for the sexual pleasure that he desires to make him feel comfortable with his situation, and Maggie could do the same with the gentleman she is left with who could take the role that Pete played in her life. However, Maggie believed that Pete looked at her differently, not as a tool for pleasure, but as a companion for life. Pete was supposed to remove her from the nasty reality that surrounded her. Instead, he passed her on to someone else. Pete did not perceive the situation the same. In his mind, he did not ruin Maggie. If she had been ruined then "he would have believed the mother and brother, who were pyrotechnic over the affair, to be responsible for it" (Crane 49). For Pete, the fact that she relied on him to give purpose to her life and remove her from her situation was her fault.

Pete serves as an example of characters in *Maggie* who find ways to assert their ego by being dominant and exploiting others, but Maggie is the one character that avoids her egos by turning to Pete (Church 11). However, she falls victim to other characters' ego and is exploited for her failure to assert her own powerful ego. After Pete rejects her, Maggie realizes that her existence will always be dominated by those around her, individuals who have stronger egos. As a whole, these people suppress Maggie, and she wishes to eliminate their dominance over her life. Her morality keeps her from turning to alcohol for pleasure, and she does not see prostitution as a way to exploit men for money like Nellie seems to. Ultimately, she has no way to assert her own ego because she can not exploit those around her. Without the ability to combat the dominance from others, Maggie turns to suicide as her only solution to end her perceived meaningless existence.

Self-actualization, where an individual moves through stages of self identity towards a higher moral understanding, plays an important factor in finding personal meaning in existence (Yalom 438). Maggie's moral understanding was already highly developed based on her knowledge of middle-class values. She noticed how other characters used alcohol to deal with the daily struggle for survival. Even though she believed Pete was different, she understood the realm of prostitution that surrounded her and how men looked to these women to build their own self-esteem. The same could be said about fighting, as the boys of Rum Alley build their identity by fighting for honor.

The process of self-actualization is evolutionary, with higher morality the end result. However, Maggie's actions do not progress towards a higher moral character. Instead, her actions show that she has departed from her original moral goals, yet she still holds the same moral understanding. When she is reduced to prostitution, Maggie is fully aware of her state of degeneration. Certainly, any other prostitute would receive the same religious condemnation that Maggie faces, but it is this awareness of her degeneration that results in her self-condemnation as well. She failed to progress through the process of self-actualization, and her purpose for existing is damaged by her immorality. She has experienced a negative moral transformation which results in self-loathing and self-doubt (Gandal 760). After she is rejected by religion, her last hope, there is no redemption in her eyes. Therefore, the end of her meaningless existence is her only alternative, and she must turn to suicide to accomplish this ending.

While looking for a purpose in life, an individual must develop a personal meaning for their existence without a reliance on others. This meaning may not be perceived by the outside world the same as the perception of the individual. Characters in *Maggie* often turn to religion, where meaning is found by following moral standards that are aimed at emulating God. However, Maggie's moral understanding and her failure to meet the standards set by playing different role in public than she does in private results in her inability to obtain meaning through religion. Ultimately, Maggie rejects any meaning that requires her to change her middle-class moral system to fit into a certain role. She declines to turn to alcohol or sexual lust. Instead, she hopes Pete will provide her with a meaning for her existence. However, Pete rejects Maggie and she turns to prostitution to make a living. Realizing her deterioration and inability to find meaning, Maggie turns to suicide as a way out of her existence.

ARDEN XVI

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THE BRICK ROAD GREER PRIZE FOR POETRY

ARDEN XVI

WHERE I AM FROM BY BODIE L. FOX

I am from the smell of grass
from the smell of pine trees.

I am from the sound of a nearby running creek
from the sound of woodpeckers pecking at the hard bark of trees.

From the sight of horses grazing
and deer and squirrels running through the woods.

I am from the from the sweet smell of fried apple pies
from the smoky smell of woodsmoke.

I am from the sound of horses neighing
from the sound of coyotes howling throughout the night.

From having a fish on the line
and watching a hawk in the air.

I am from the smell of fruit trees in bloom
from the smell of fresh tilled ground.

I am from cold morning hunting
from hot summer evening horse rides.

From where snakes are plentiful
and where corn grows tall.

I am from the Pocket.

Green, mindless, unkillable ghosts.

In Georgia, the legend says

That you must close your windows

~Kudzu by James Dickey

One leaf waits at the end of its stem, a thin channel
to the nutrients beneath the earth's skin.

I snap the thin stem, severing the synapse,
and abandon the little leaf.

Yet another stem sprouts with more leaves
that lunge towards my legs, lashing out
as a separate vine slithers from behind.
These serpents thirst for a taste of my skin,

stalking me. I try to flee but fall.
Other stems find my quivering fingers and
tightly, hold my hands as I lay on my back.
Leaves sprout from my split ends

and accumulate on my throat,
and suffocating my airway.
My eyelids spread and change into green petals,
which conceal the sky from my eyes.

As I open my mouth, a small stem germinates
and grows roots in the back of my throat,
holding me still and quiet
and keeping me home.

THE ORLENE JONES POULSEN AWARD FOR FICTION

ARDEN XVI

A SMILE AND A NOD BY KATHERINE DIANNE HESTE

Someday all I've come to be will fade into a memory. Nature shows us this is true by washing away our footprints in the sand; nature decays our bodies underground when they're no longer needed. The fact that I could disappear without leaving a trace is slightly morbid. I watch the streets I grew up on gradually fill with domestic abuse and violence; cold stares and silence are how we greet each other. I am a man from nowhere with no dreams, I just sit on my front steps watching society rip into its own seams. This is why when I found a tiny soul I could help, I acknowledged it with a smile and a nod.

The Lee girl was an isolated child. She would sit on the corner with tattered clothes and a cigarette in hand. I never actually saw her smoking one, but I reasoned it satisfied her, feeling tough to just hold one. On that corner where she sat some days with a scowl, sometimes with a blank stare, passersby would walk on either intentionally ignoring her or admonishing her on how she'd be just like her mother.

I have to say that I'm not one for people. Their opinions do not faze me and in the end, it all amazes me how wrapped up they are in the music and the movies...sometimes I think maybe that's why I witnessed what I did and when on that December evening.

I, having just rounded the corner of Eighth and Montony from the market, bumped into the back of a preoccupied officer. There was some sort of scene going on with a stout, middle-aged woman shaking the Lee girl, yelling in a strong oriental accent about a bag of candy apparently purloined from her son, whom stood at attention beside her. I stopped, not because I was interested, but because the throng of onlookers sneering at the young thief was blocking my way. I remember admiring her for her unfazed expression as the lady completely shook her east to west.

"Miss, we're going to need to call your parents. Don't you have someone we can call?" the officer was obviously ready to abandon the situation as the girl looked up and said almost inaudibly, "That's my dad," pointing to me. She was trying to lie her way out of further trouble, hoping I'd catch on. I said nothing but placed my hand on her shoulder and started walking with her so everyone would just drop everything.

Once out of sight, I started to part from the silent miscreant when she grabbed my hand and placed in it a miniature handful of candy. Then she wordlessly went her way, me digesting the irony, as her tangled obsidian colored hair swayed in the polluted air.

Several weeks passed and the new year came on. I'd see the Lee girl from a distance in the same short sleeves and skirt-shorts. One day she sat on the corner with her head between her legs, skin almost translucent. The look of innocence on her face competed with the maturity in her eyes and I, he with a guarded heart, felt a stab of pity.

"You know, you should wear something warmer when you're playing outside." Really, now?

"Does it look like I'm 'playing outside', sir?" she looked up and her lips were a definite purple, her cheeks a certain rosy flush. To me the real question to ask would be,

"Does it look like I have any other clothes?"

"You should come inside." Immediately after suggesting this, I didn't want her to feel threatened because it was such an inappropriate request of a man my age. All I wanted was to maybe be the person to show her some mercy. Without question though, she came in where I quickly gave her an old sweatshirt to wear.

As I hosted this tiny creature in my house, I wondered when small acts of kindness like this ended. I didn't have much, but I had enough that seemed like a lot to her. Ramen noodles on the stove, I invited her to stay for dinner. Almost savagely, she ate the food like a stray jumps at scraps. Embracing this weakened moment of hers, I asked, "Where's your mom at?"

Everyone knew the situation with her mom. Another immigrant from the East looking for a start, short of a buck, and winds up in stuff you'd never want to be in. Now that her daughter was in my house weak, hungry, and dirty, the respect I had for the lady was no longer small, but non-existent.

"I don't know." She paused for a moment and then began eating again, saying, "But I always know she'll be back in time to tuck me in." So maybe one tally mark of respect was added back to the scoreboard. Apparently, this meant a lot to her whose name I later found out that same night was Ami.

The rest of the winter months progressed like this. After I'd get off work, Ami would be sitting on my steps. I'd have rented a movie I thought she'd like - she especially loved *The Little Mermaid*. We'd cook cheap meals and talk about our old country. It was never much, but it meant so much more than anyone could explain.

I feel as if I was a father to her. I'd surprise her with clothes and those mock Barbie dolls, the ones with the big heads because she liked the way they looked better. I provided her with stability and she was the antidote to my loneliness.

Probably the best memory I have of little Ami Lee was when she asked me to be her parent/guardian to the planetarium for school. Even in her home situation she was such a bright child and loved to learn. Above our heads in one particularly high-ceilinged room was a realistic replica of our solar system. Sitting upon my shoulders, she pointed towards Mercury, Mars, Venus, Jupiter...naming everything perfectly and the constellations surrounding it. I bought her a snow globe with the planets in it because it fascinated her, stars falling instead of snowflakes.

One day I heard a loud rapping at my door. When opened, I recognized the frazzled, disheveled, short Chinese woman as Ms. Lee. I had accidentally left the bolt locked when I attempted to open the door, but was glad I did when I saw two bruised fists swinging towards my face.

"Now - you - stay - away from my daughter!" she screamed. "You with your thinking that you're so much better than everyone else. I don't want her near you again; you're

not her blood, so leave her alone!"

She had the same desperate look as her daughter, but this time I only felt frustration - frustration that this was a woman and I could not hit her. I simply shut the door.

Several days passed, and I did not hear from Ami until one day, I found a cardboard box taped haphazardly together with a note attached. The note was folded in on itself with an intricate drawing of the silhouette of a man with a little girl on his shoulders. Beside it in neat bubble letters was the phrase, "Thank you."

Opening the box was the snow globe with our universe inside of it, shiny and in mint condition. It had been her most precious item and my most precious memory.

Later that day, I walked to the Lee's apartment knowing what I would find - nothing and no one. So I leave you with this - when you find such a soul, how do you let it go? You don't. You've made a trace on somebody, you became more than just a nameless face in society. You part ways, but your heart remains, and nature carries on, the cycle of life repeating itself. All we have in the end may be memories, but it shouldn't be sad if you bid it adieu with a smile and a nod.

After a quick look in the fridge, Narda goes to the window. The sun's shining down on the overgrown rosemary bush and the dying cantaloupe vines growing beside the patio. The neighbor's cat is curled besides a pathetic looking azalea bush, eyes peering up at the kitchen window. Behind her in the kitchen, Narda hears her mom, Joy, enter and flip the light-switch.

She doesn't say good morning.

Narda knows she's thinking about girls. She's pouring cinnamon coffee into her oversized mug as she thinks about girls. She's opening the fridge, and maybe, Narda thinks, she's thinking about boys, too. She's sequencing them; she knows her mom. First, there was a girl, then a boy, then *another* boy. She's asking herself why they're back to girls.

Narda stares at the backyard, waiting.

"Did you eat breakfast?" Joy asks. Narda turns from the window.

"No," she answers. "I wasn't hungry."

Joy nods once. She takes a sip of coffee, and her eyes fix themselves on the silver bowl of fruit on the kitchen table. There are oranges, bananas, and a wrinkled green apple piled up, and besides the bowl, a container of salt sits, its silver spout flipped up. None of the fruit is particularly sweet, and the salt is a good counter to the sourness. Joy reaches for the apple, feels it, and goes to the utensil drawer for a knife.

Narda watches her peel it by the sink and reaches in the bowl for an orange. She's still not hungry, but she doesn't know what to do with her hands.

She never knows what to do with her hands.

Narda's fingernails pick at the top of the orange, slowly peeling back the skin, and juice begins to drip down her hand. Her eyes flicker up to the napkins, but they're on the rack where they normally are, right besides the sink—and Joy. Instead of going for them, she stays at the other end of the kitchen table, and Narda wipes the back of her hand on her pajama pants. The air around her is saturated with the smell of oranges, and she wonders if her mom can smell it at the other end of the small kitchen.

Joy drops her knife into the sink and bites into her skinned apple. Her lips pucker when she really gets a taste of it, and she examines the apple in her hand for a moment before dropping it into the compost bucket. She turns to Narda. "Can I have half?" she asks, gesturing to the orange. Narda nods, placing a chunk of the peel on the table.

While Narda peels, depositing bits of the bright orange skin on the growing pile on the table, Joy retrieves two napkins and places them both on the table. She slides them in her daughter's direction. Narda's standing on the other side of the table, but when she stretches over her end of the table, she is able to reach one of the napkins with a little effort. Narda uses it to mop at her hand and her arm, nose wrinkling at the feel of the juice dripping down and down her arm. She drops the dirty napkin and the last bit of peel on the table and pries the naked fruit in half. She sets it on the second napkin on the table.

"I thought you said girls were crazy," Joy says, dragging the napkin back towards her. Narda picks at the white parts of the orange, shrugging. "I was upset when I told you that," she says. "Upset and sixteen."

Joy persists, "You said you wouldn't do this to yourself again." She bites into a piece of her half of the orange, frowning. Narda doesn't know if she's frowning because of her or the juice dripping down her chin.

She picks up the orange peels and walks around the kitchen table to the sink, dumping them on top of the apple in the compost bucket.

"You like Rosy," Narda tries. She thinks about movie nights. They would curl up in her bed and make fun of B-rated horror films. They would always watch two films before going to sleep, and Joy always insisted on cooking dinner. It was always a big dinner and a special dessert because she liked to pamper Narda's best friends. Joy loved that they spent so much time together—when they were friends.

Joy turns her face away, spitting a seed into her hand. "I like her," she says.

"You just don't want me to date her," Narda says. The orange slice grows sour in her mouth, but she chews and swallows it, seeds and all.

Joy picks up the salt on the table, pours some into her palm, and sets the container back on the kitchen table. "You dated that nice boy," she says. "And you talked for hours with that musician—the one who'd sing to you over the phone."

Narda stretches to reach the salt. "I liked them," she says. She's not lying. She liked them; she liked them just as much as she likes Rosy now.

"Jared cared about you a lot," Joy says. Narda pours salt into her hand and too much spills into her palm. "He used to call you all the time. Maybe he wasn't exactly right for you, but I know there's someone out there who's right for you. You just have to be patient." She presses a piece of orange into the salt and eats it.

"What if Rosy is right for me?" Narda asks. "She likes the same things as me. She's funny. She's beautiful." Her tongue trips over the sentences, and her cheeks grow pink. Inhaling deeply, Narda tries again. "Uncle Angelo's gay. You still love him."

Joy's eyes widen, and she sets the remainder of her orange on the table and pours the salt in her hand onto her napkin on the table. After wiping her hands on her sweatpants, she steps forward, advancing on her daughter before reaching out with both hands to cup her daughter's face. Narda is forced to drop her own hands to her side. To keep the salt from spilling all over the floor, she closes it up in her fist.

"I love you," Joy says. She pauses, staring into Narda's face. Narda, in turn, focuses on the canister of salt on the table. "I will always love you," she says louder. One of her hands drops to her daughter's shoulder, and she kisses the bare cheek. "I just don't want you to make another mistake." She draws Narda into her arms, hugging her while Narda stands stiffly with her hands at her sides.

When her mom lets go, stepping backwards until there's several feet of space between them, Narda shoves the last two pieces of orange into her mouth and moves sluggishly to the sink to wash the salt off her hand, disappointed she didn't really have the chance to use it. It feels like a waste.

"They weren't mistakes—not even Tessa," Narda says. Joy lets out a loud breath. "She wasn't."

"You never had anything good to say about her."

"I didn't tell you we'd dated until after we broke up," Narda says. "And it was a messy breakup, but before that, we were happy. We got along well at the beginning." Her throat closes up, and for a moment, she can't speak at all. "It was just really hard at the time—because you were mad. She was mad."

Joy's eyes narrow, "I had the right to be. You were in a relationship with someone for over a year, and you never told me about it."

Narda opens her mouth, but after a moment of consideration, she closes it again. "Well, it's done now."

"Only now you want to try and date another girl."

"I am dating another girl," Narda says. "Another *woman*. I just wanted to tell you because I didn't last time."

Joy's lips thin into a line, and she picks up her coffee. She holds the cup to her lips but doesn't drink, just lets the hot coffee lick at her lips. Narda stares at the salt container on the table, and Joy finally tips back the cup and drinks a sip. Two sips. She gulps down half the coffee and turns to the hallway.

"Well, you're an adult," she says, shrugging. She walks towards her bedroom.

Narda picks up the salt and puts it into the spice cabinet above the sink. Joy's bedroom door opens then closes, and Narda can hear her mom turn the lock. She stares into the sink, eyes zeroing in on the tiny pieces of salt stuck to the sides of the sink. She turns the tap until a trickle of water is dripping out of the facet and rinses the salt away, watches it crawl into the drain.

THE PAUL HACKETT AWARD FOR CREATIVE NONFICTION

ARDEN XVI

WHAT'S IN A NAME? BY AMY PAN

It seems like every old movie that features a first-day-of-school scene goes the same way. Little rustic schoolhouse cabin. Young, inexperienced teacher. Noisy, rowdy, incorrigible little kids. The classroom, will be, of course, in chaos. And, somewhere in between Jack stealing Andy's lunch and Molly pulling Becky's hair, the teacher will, hesitantly, timidly, but inevitably, call roll.

But of course, the teacher can never, ever, *ever* make it to the bottom of the list, because without a doubt, there is always one poor, poor child, be it Johnny Poopenspiel or Mary Humperdink, whose name is just a little, well, *amusing*. The whole class will erupt into laughter, and thus, the first day of school will end in the same pandemonium with which it started.

In relative comparison to that, I can't complain. I mean, I'm Amy Pan. That *hardly* lines up to Johnny Poopenspiel in the unfortunate name department. Yet, throughout my entire childhood, I had grown up bathed in antipathy towards my given moniker, for several reasons.

First, let me just establish the fact that I'm well aware there are worst names in the world. I'm eternally grateful that I wasn't born "Imogen Gay Poots." Or "Gilda Goggins." Or even "Melvin Calvin," that old chemist whose self-titled "Calvin Cycle" we were coerced into studying during ninth grade biology. I mean, *Melvin Calvin*, really? It's almost the worst one yet because it seems like his parents actually *tried* to make his name rhyme, but you know, failed.

Anyway, I digress. Quite clearly, my last name is also the word used to describe a certain inanimate object. In case you didn't know, I'll supply a dictionary definition from our dear friend, Merriam-Webster:

pan \□pan\ (noun)

a : a usually broad, shallow, and open container for domestic use (as for cooking)

b : a round shallow usually metal container for separating metal (as gold) from waste by washing

c British : toilet... (my personal favorite!)

To be honest, I wouldn't have originally minded these particular correlations at all; as previously mentioned, having "Pan" as a last name is hardly something worth complaining about. However, the only roadblock in the way of a fine-and-dandy self-satisfaction with my moniker lay in the form of a cruel little first-grade boy – let's call him Joe.

Every morning when I walked into homeroom, Joe would come up with a brand-new way of mocking my last name. Amy "Panning-For-Gold" (obviously he was *not* a sheltered child), Amy "Pan-Fried-Noodles" (gotta love the personalized Asian joke in that one), Amy "Toilet" (props to Joe for all that originality). I guess you have to commend Joe

for his persistence...

I thought it was annoying more than anything. I mean, didn't Joe have better things to do with his precious time? But soon, much to my dismay, the other kids began to join Joe in his crusade. Now that I think about it, I can't even count how many times I was greeted by the burning, age-old question, "Is Peter Pan your brother??" and the oh-so-searing second grade insult, "HAHAHA your name is sooooo dumb!" Well, ouch.

Of course, first grade ended, along with Joe & Company's endless taunts, and the whole matter didn't faze me much after that. But, around third grade or so, I had an early-life existential crisis of sorts in which I questioned everything. I remember waking up one morning, with the inquiry of my last name's meaning burning in my brain.

I knew it was Chinese because, well, I'm Chinese, but I honestly had no idea what it stood for. A great majority of Chinese surnames have a deeper meaning. *Wang* for example, translates to "king" and *Liu* to "willow." I wanted to know what *Pan* represented in Chinese, so of course, I went to pester my dear old dad, the ultimate bearer of knowledge.

My father, after hearing my initial question, answered (and I now quote), "Nothing. It's just a name, doesn't stand for anything. It's like... Lewis or something. I dunno."

Well. Okay, so I couldn't find any deep meaning there. But no worries! We were learning basic Spanish in elementary school, and perhaps I could find some significance there. So, being the cool, way-ahead-of-my-time kid that I was, I googled "Spanish Dictionary," typed in my last name, and alas, this is what I found:

pan [pahn] (nombre)

a : bread

Huh. Bread, really? *Really?! I didn't know how I felt about this.* Was it too much to ask for me to find a deep connotation to my last name that wasn't inexplicably tied with inanimate objects? My little third-grade brain could hardly understand this terrible injustice that had been bestowed upon me. Looking back on it, I have absolutely no idea why I was so focused on this issue instead of being off playing with dolls in a corner somewhere, but I can only remember my one-track determination.

Eventually this obnoxious, inquisitive phase of my life ended and I came to terms with my name's superficiality. But, whenever I think about the entire ordeal, it provides me with both a sense of amusement and a sense of perplexity. How did I manage to go from a pan-fried laughingstock to a miniature snooping etymologist?

By now, I've come to accept my name for what it is: a name. I suppose the whole point of this experience as a questioning, curious, insufferable little girl paved an appropriate path to my attitude later on in life. Today, I am still questioning, curious, and

(sometimes) insufferable, but I'm not so little anymore, and I've learned that every once in a while, it's better to just embrace the unexplainable and go with the flow. At the end of the day, my surname will always be a part of me, and I've learned to take it as is. And besides, bread is delicious and toilets are useful, so if you're still out there, Joe With-A-Boring-Last-Name, the joke's on you. ☺

10 April 2013

My knees sunk into the beige carpet in my bedroom as I pulled out the bottom drawer of my dark dresser. Our kitten sat and peeked over the lip of the drawer, waiting to swat at whatever I might pull out. I sat back on my calves, stared at his little brown face and his whiskers that were the size of a much larger cat's, and wondered if he knew what death was. My sister and I had agreed to name him Amontillado after one of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, but Monty would never know that. He probably wouldn't know about death until it came time for him to meet it.

Monty did know the sound of the mosquitoes buzzing outside the screen of the kitchen window and how they tasted when he caught and ate those that managed to slip inside, through the hole in the screen.

I reached into the dresser drawer and pulled out a pair of black panty hose. He swatted at the legs once with a declawed paw but quickly became disinterested. He hopped into my underwear drawer and sat down, peacefully oblivious. I pulled him out and shooed him away from the pile of black clothes on the floor beside me so that he wouldn't get hair on them.

"You need something ironed?"

My mother's voice crept around the corner into my bedroom. The only other noise was the bump of the iron against the ironing board and the hum of the air conditioner fighting the heat of late spring in Georgia.

Easter Sunday 2012

We had never missed the annual family picnic on Easter. Easter Sundays were always the same. Church, then back home to change into our faded jean shorts and thin t-shirts. Mom and Dad would pack up our dented suburban with fishing poles, tackle boxes, and the scuffed cooler while my sister and I rubbed sunscreen onto our fair, freckled skin. I'd squirt a bit too much into her palms just to irritate her and to get her back for leaving strands of her waist-length hair, plastered to the shower wall. Sometimes the strands spelled out her name or formed the shape of a heart.

After coating on the sunscreen, we were off to the lake with its crooked picnic tables and bobbing docks. As we drove with the windows down and the wind beating our hair around, I'd think about how those Sundays were always full of f's: fellowship, family, fishing, and fried chicken. There are always too many buckets of fried chicken at the family picnic, always crammed between the golden potato salad and the devilled eggs. But, where I come from chicken is something you don't want to run out of. Chicken or family.

He was there to greet us in his cut-off jean shorts and tennis shoes as we crunched down the gravel driveway to the lake. His belly poked over the top of his shorts, and his bald spot gleamed in the Georgia sunshine. When the suburban stopped, I got out,

slammed my door, and stepped into the suffocating humidity.

"Morgie."

He was the only person to call me that. Not the usual, "Mo," or "Momo," or even "Sam's oldest." Just Morgie.

"Hi, Uncle Larry," I hugged him with both arms.

He didn't do one-armed hugs, and he wasn't afraid to tell you that or to hold on until you returned a "proper" hug.

His belly felt surprisingly hard for its size.

"Can you believe that you two were scared of me when you were little? Ya'll wouldn't even let me hug you. She even cried once," he glanced at my sister.

Looking at him and his bulky frame, I couldn't blame my younger self. After all, I barely knew him back then. He might be a bit frightening to look at, if you didn't know him. He was taller than my dad but had the same wide shoulders, dark hair, and thick skin from years of working in the sun. Now, he just looked like a big, balding teddy bear with a protective shell over his stomach, like there was something inside worth protecting.

"Happy Easter," I said, noticing that his legs weren't as tanned as his arms, which were darker than the rest of his body. My dad had a similar farmer's tan.

"Hey, ugly," Uncle Larry called out to my dad.

"Who's talking over there? Larry? Oh, I couldn't see you through the reflection of the sun off your bald head," my dad carried our cooler to the nearest picnic table with a boyish smile on his face.

"Well, the twins are running around here somewhere," Uncle Larry looked over his shoulder. I looked past him, observing the other people from a distance. A few stood on the very end of one of the dock, the one that looked like it was about to break loose of its tether at the first sight of a wave from a passing boat.

There were quite a few other people around now. Some I recognized from previous picnics and some were strangers. It was hard to keep track of everyone in such a big family. Someone always seemed to slip through the cracks.

"All the girls are still wearing their Easter dresses from church," Uncle Larry said. "Like the ones your momma got for you when you were little."

He always watched the grandkids, looking over his shoulder or chasing them with a bottle of sunscreen, even fixing them platefuls of macaroni and cheese or bowls of banana pudding during the family picnics and holiday gatherings. I couldn't even keep track of all of the kids now, but he could.

Without a word, he wandered off, and I watched him pick up one of his grandkids, a little girl wearing a bright yellow dress. He would show her off to my sister and I like we hadn't met her before, just as he would show off the kids to anyone who would listen. I shaded my eyes from the hot sun and thought that he was a better father than the chil-

dren's own father.

"How's the fishing?" I swatted some gnats away from my face when he returned. The girl looked down at us with big blue eyes.

"Jimmy caught a catfish 'bout an hour ago, right there," he pointed towards the water. "You girls hungry? We brought two buckets of chicken."

10 April 2013

"Oh, God," I sighed, seeing the long tear in the thin fabric. My skin looked even more pale against the dark black fabric of the pantyhose. I started to take them off. They were too tight anyway, and wearing them was cruel and unusually punishment. But, I knew that I had to wear them today and that the physical discomfort would soon be the least of my worries.

"You need something ironed?" Mom asked again from the other room.

I pictured her leaning over the old ironing board in her closet, ironing my sister's pants or maybe Dad's white, collared shirt.

"No," I was on my knees again, shuffling through my underwear drawer, trying to find a new pair of pantyhose with one hand and holding our kitten in the other. He looked at the world from this new perch, wrapping his legs around my arm.

I thought back to the Easter Sunday a few weeks before and how we all had the flu and couldn't go. The sickness had spread quickly through the house. I curled up on the couch, feeling like the catfish, which had washed up on the lake shore one Easter Sunday. All dead and bloated. If we forced our sickly selves off the couch, I wondered if the pack of grandkids would poke me with twigs they found near the dock like they did to that poor fish.

"Tell Nanny we're sorry," I shivered from the fever.

My sister and I were the only ones to call her Nanny.

The four of us knew that Nanny would understand. And, we'd see everyone at Thanksgiving.

At the bottom of the drawer, I found a good pair of pantyhose and pulled them on as our kitten watched from his new place on my bed. His paws sunk into the thick comforter. The pantyhose were still too tight, but I didn't have time to keep searching for other pairs.

I pulled on my black skirt and headed towards the kitchen with the torn pair in hand. Mom caught me in the hallway. She was wearing her only black dress, a simple pin-striped one with an elegant slit in the back. Her fingers worked to secure a pair of earrings in her ears.

"What's that?"

"They had a tear in them," I said. "But, I found another pair."

"Good. We can't wear torn pantyhose to a funeral," she smiled weakly and went back to the ironing board. There were things to be done before we could climb into our dented suburban and head to the funeral home.

In the kitchen, I hesitated in front of the trashcan, thinking that maybe these pantyhose could be saved. I rubbed the sheer fabric between my fingers. They weren't ruined, just a little torn. Something that a little time and patience or a steady hand could mend.

Easter Sunday 2012

The heat was almost unbearable as I stood facing the sun. We had already eaten lunch, and one older woman had asked me about my choice of major three times before I could even finish my potato salad. I was ready to slip away for a game of horseshoes. My mom and aunts were cleaning up and covering the trays to make sure that no wasps or gnats got into the food. A hot breeze blew and carried my mother's voice out to where I stood, waiting for the other players. Mom was talking about her banana pudding recipe. The one my dad's cousin's wife always tried to steal.

"Here you go, Morgie," Uncle Larry handed me two horseshoes. I held one in each hand and let the weight pull at my muscles. "We gotta get some points this round." He took his place next to me. Team mates weren't supposed to stand on the same side of the playing area, but we made our own rules.

"I think Dad's cheating down there. That last one was a ringer, I'm sure," I said as he wiped the back of his hand across his forehead. Unknowingly, he drew a line of the orange dirt from the horseshoe area across his skin. It looked like the marked foreheads on Ash Wednesday.

"If he's playing, he's cheating," Uncle Larry said, softly.

I was going to tell him about the orange line, but he stepped up to the mark to take his turn.

"Hey, Sammy," he raised one of the horseshoes up to eye-level. "Here comes a ringer."

I couldn't see the horseshoe because of the sun, but I heard it clink against the stake on the other end of the horseshoe area.

"This far," Dad held up some fingers from the other end of the area. "Got some points but no ringer."

Uncle Larry lined up and aimed again. This time the horseshoe rolled too far past the stake.

"Well, the sun got in my eyes on that one. Threw off my aim," he wiped his hands together and then on the front of his shirt.

"Your turn, girlie," he turned and said with a smile. "Aim for your daddy's big belly," he chuckled at his own joke.

I stepped up to the line and aimed, squinting against the sun. The horseshoe landed

short. I aimed again with the second shoe, waiting for the breeze to die down. I tossed and heard the heavy shoe clink against the stake.

"Yes," I clapped once, which sent up a puff of orange dust into the air from my dirty hands.

Uncle Larry must have seen the puff of dust because he came over and told me to wipe my hands on his shirt.

"It's all dirty and sweaty anyways," he added.

"Wait, wait... She knocked yours further away from the stake," Dad called in our direction.

"What? Why you cheating?" Uncle Larry asked.

"Cheating? Come see for yourself. No blood, no foul," Dad said as Uncle Larry stomped down to the other side.

I shaded my eyes with an orange-encrusted hand and watched them examining the area around the stake. They were so alike, but so different. I wondered what their father looked like.

He died in 1989 from a massive heart attack at age forty-eight. I never met him, but Dad always said that he would have loved me and my sister. I didn't hear any of them talk about him that much. Only here and there little memories of him would find their way into the conversation, creeping in like kudzu.

Standing there, I tried to imagine what he would have been like or what my sister and I would have called him. Grampy? Grampy and Nanny? Probably not.

I wondered what kind of man he would have had to have been to keep up with Nanny, who, in her seventies, still threatens to judo chop anyone who beats her in a hand of poker. During our Thanksgiving and Christmas tournaments, no one is spared from her threats. She even judo chopped Larry once after a hand, but she didn't make too big of a fuss because he usually ended up in the red. Together, Dad and I usually ended up making a profit.

I bet my grandfather was good with cars, like my dad is. I bet he could tell the make and model by just seeing the back view or just the headlights. I bet he liked to drink, maybe even a little too much, like my uncles. I bet he had a good, loving heart like Uncle Larry, but a softer stomach like Grampys are supposed to.

I bet he regretted missing the births of his grandkids, their first Easter Sunday picnic, their graduation, their learning how to drive, or how to love.

He never could have known that my dad always thought that he himself would die at the age of forty-eight. That my dad silently worried about missing my high school graduation or my sister learning how to drive or our first "sisters only" road trip together. That he would miss playing barefoot basketball in our backyard during the summer. That my dad wondered what would happen to us if he was to leave us the way his dad left him.

Most of all, that my dad thought he had to keep his fears a secret for our sake until he passed the end of forty-eight.

"Well, I made it," my dad said on his forty-ninth birthday. He was sitting on the cream-colored cushions of our couch, surrounded by tissue paper from his birthday gift bags. Even when he got up, there was an indentation left on the cushions as if part of him was still sitting there. The end of forty-eight for him was a new beginning.

Hearing my dad and Uncle Larry arguing over the placement of the horseshoes brought me back to the game. I wiped my damp forehead with the back of my hand, and I didn't care if I left an orange streak across my skin. It would last, at least until we got home, and it would remind me of the day that had so quickly passed.

10 April 2013

On the drive to the funeral home, the four of us were quiet, either thinking or remembering. I felt numb as the seat belt pulled tightly across my chest. I imagined what Uncle Larry would have felt in his last moments.

A numbness creeping from his center outward to his arms, spreading to his fingertips as he tried to clean up the breakfast dishes. He listened to the grandkids in the other room, watching morning cartoons and ignored the numbness.

The steam of the hot water rising up into his face and the sound of the water blurring the voices from the television. The sudden sense of lightheadedness that caused him to turn off the sink. Grabbing a paper towel, he wiped his face and tried to take a few deep breaths. Even this was hard to do. Then, a throbbing in his chest, gentle at first but gradually increasing.

He couldn't feel his fingers now and squeezed his hands into fists as tightly as he could. The voices from the television seemed so loud one moment and then so quiet, almost distant, the next. The tightness in his chest so severe now that he thought this was the end.

Maybe he thanked God for moving him to start going to church a few months ago or for saving him. Maybe he thought about the grandkids and how someone else would have to make them lunch as he started to fall.

6 April 2013

The day we received the phone call, I was standing in the kitchen, fresh out of the shower. The cold water from my hair dripped down onto my back, and I felt numb. I looked at my mom's face as she hung up after the initial phone call, how the wrinkles around her eyes moved like ocean waves and how her lips quivered.

I heard Larry's voice as he started telling a story about his pro wrestling days when we all knew that he never wrestled. I heard him giving my sister and me advice on how

to shoot when he knew that we had never held a gun.

"Shoot for the stomach, girls," he said. "If they duck, you hit 'em here in the head. And, if they jump," he gestured to below the belt, "well, you know where you'd hit 'em." Then, he laughed.

He had such a passion about things he had never done before but said he had. He told us about having an ice cream truck, which is one of the things he actually did. He even brought it by our house once with its repetitive music blaring. I could almost hear the music as I stood in the kitchen, feeling goosebumps prickling on my arms.

"I've got some drumsticks," Uncle Larry said leaning out of the truck's window. My sister and I were trying to decide what kind of ice cream we wanted.

"I'll take one of those," I said, still looking at the brightly colored pictures of ice cream on the side of the old truck.

Uncle Larry didn't have the ice cream truck long, and he didn't talk about it much after that, not like he talked about wrestling.

A few more drops dripped from my hair onto my back. More goosebumps rose on my skin.

Uncle Larry told us in the past that he had had heart attacks, that he took eleven pills a day or more if he needed them. I never saw him take any pills though. Not even at Christmas or Thanksgiving when he got himself a second helping of my mom's banana pudding or between rounds of our poker tournaments. Not even during our annual Easter picnics. Maybe that's why I didn't focus on it so much and why I should have focused on it more.

Cold and wet, I stood in the kitchen and all I could think about was how Uncle Larry had created a family tradition. The tile felt strange beneath my bare feet as I watched my mother dial my dad's cell phone number to tell him that his youngest brother had died of a heart attack at forty-eight.

10 April 2013

I stood in the lobby of the funeral home, pulling at my fingernails. With so many people around, I felt like I was surrounded by a flood of dark clothes. All the faces blended together after a while, and I smelled like someone else's "parfum de grandma" perfume from all the hugging. The pungent scent of roses was so strong that I could taste it, and I forced myself to swallow instead of spit onto the fancy carpet.

I looked around and kept waiting for something, but I didn't know what.

The voices around me talked about how strange it was, unbelievable even for something so tragic to happen twice in one family and how young Uncle Larry was.

"We should get our hearts checked."

"He was twenty years younger than I am now."

"Come here, sugar, and give me a hug."

The lobby was too clean with its hard couches and mounted paintings with ornate, gold frames. I wanted to spill something onto the carpet to disrupt the flow of the intricate pattern or scuff up the glossy table leg with the toes of my black heels.

I thought about the torn pantyhose waiting in the trashcan back at home on top of that morning's practically untouched breakfast of bland toast and eggs. I should have worn that pair today. I shouldn't have thrown them away so easily. I would try to save them when we got back home.

One of the voices mentioned bringing fried chicken for the meal after the funeral. I didn't know how anyone could think of food. I could smell the rotting catfish on the shore of the lake and hear the flies buzzing around it. I breathed through my mouth, hoping to weaken the taste of the pungent perfume in my mouth.

"Morgan," a relative I barely knew came up to me. Morgan, not Morgie. And then, I knew what was missing.

Uncle Larry wasn't there as he had been at my mom's mom's funeral or at his stepfather's funeral. I had been waiting for Uncle Larry to walk through those spotless glass doors into the too clean lobby.

In times like this, he was the one to lighten up a room or tell a story about his pro wrestling days while my dad worked to get the affairs taken care of. As I hugged this stranger relative, I could almost see Uncle Larry walking into the lobby, not wearing a collared shirt or a suit, but his jean cut-offs and a faded t-shirt. He walked in with his bulging belly leading the way. The bright light from the ceiling gleamed off his bald head as if he was standing in the sun at midday. Was that a fishing pole in his hand? The loose bobber swung back and forth as Uncle Larry walked inside among the people who didn't notice him. His eyes found me.

"Morgie," I could almost hear him say. "If you get too hot fishing on the dock, I got some sunscreen in the van. Behind the medicine bag with my heart pills. You know, I can't leave home without them."

Then, he walked out just as he had come. With the bobber swinging in the hot breeze, he stepped back into the high humidity from the cold lobby. I could hear some geese quacking just around the corner like they did at the lake. The sound of the waves merged with the first few notes of another song. Some music started to play, and the crowd of people started moving.

My pantyhose felt tighter than before as my feet started moving forward with the pull of the crowd. One part of my heart grew a hard outer shell like something inside needed protection. The voices quieted as the crowd approached the interior room and the blue coffin.

I thought about the torn pantyhose and the smell of the dead, bloated catfish at the

lake, and I felt my black heels pinching my toes. I looked straight ahead and knew that if this funeral had been for someone else, for me, he would have been there. Uncle Larry would have been in the pews with us, listening to the preacher or thinking about what to cook his grandkids for dinner and wearing the same pair of tennis shoes he wore on Easter Sundays.

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